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DECEMBER 2000

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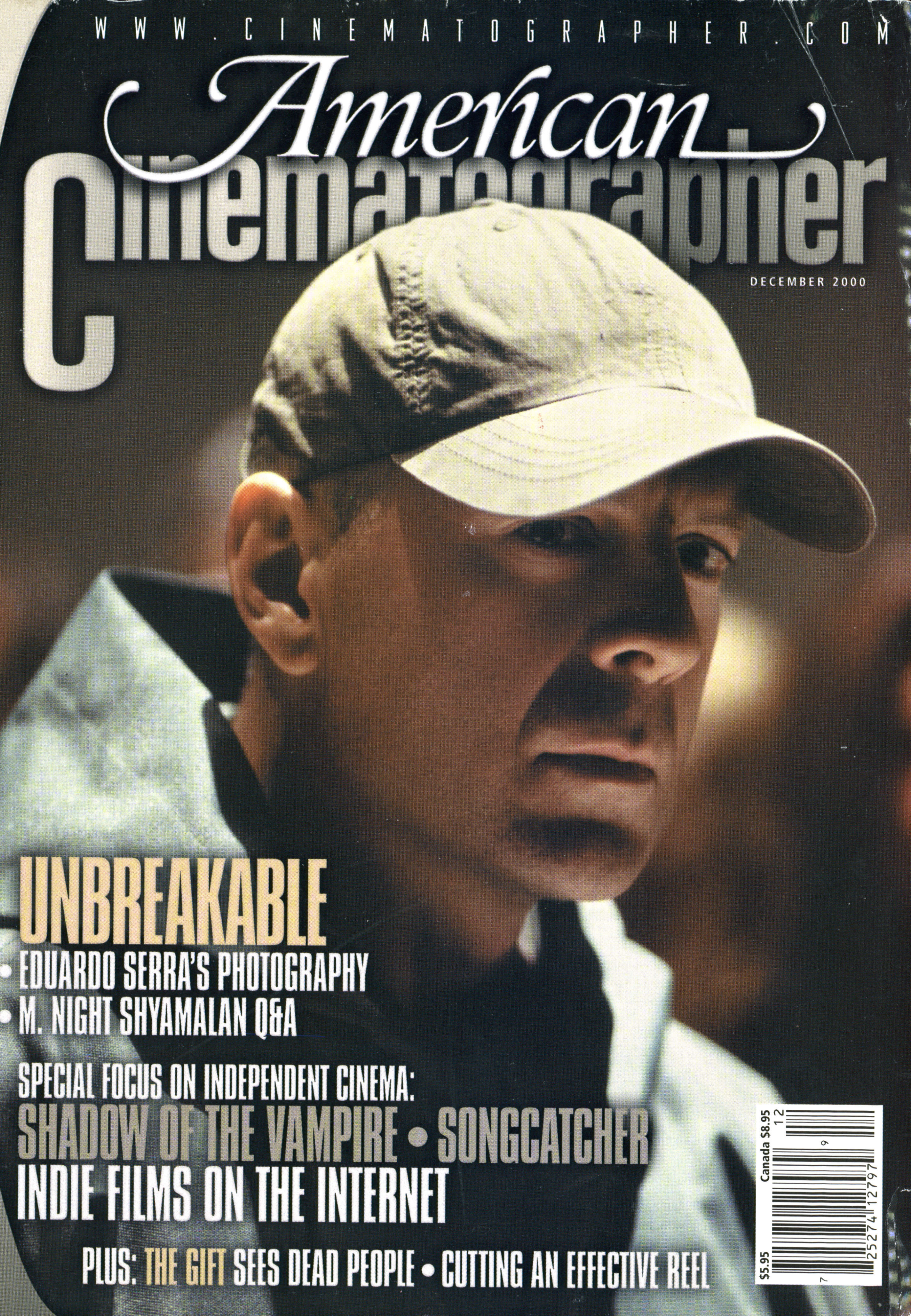

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- EDUARDO SERRA'S PHOTOGRAPHY
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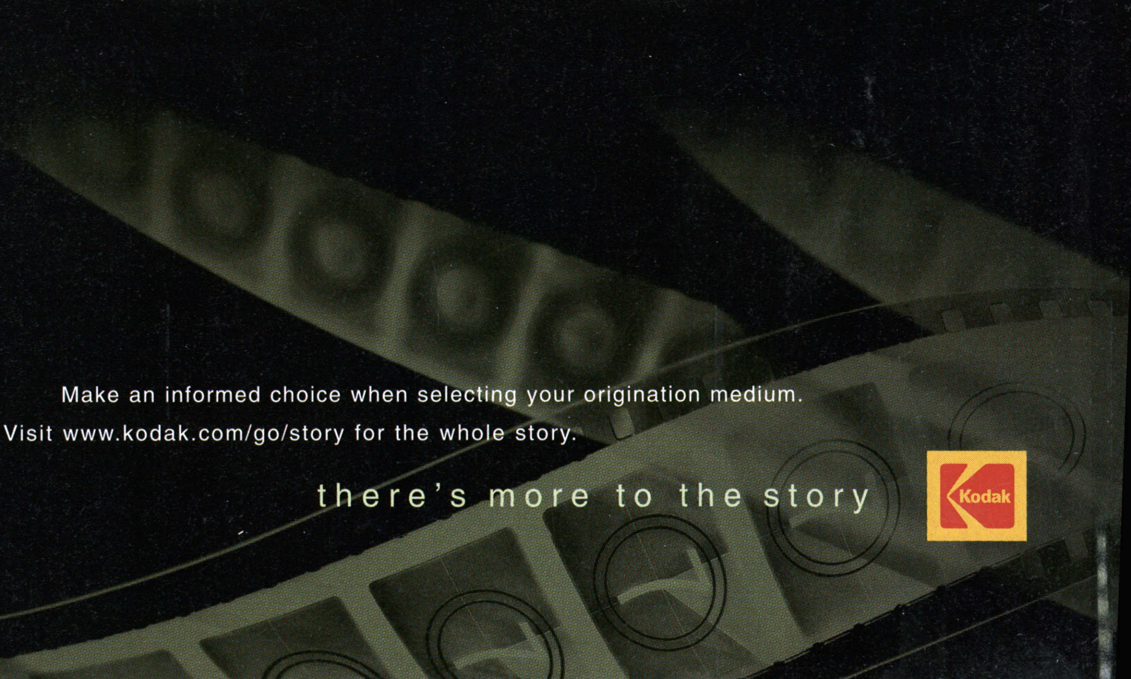

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The International Journal of Film & Digital Production Techniques

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On Our Cover: Security guard David Dunne (Bruce Willis) discovers that he's invulnerable to physical damage in *Unbreakable*, a paranormal drama directed by M. Night Shyamalan and photographed by Eduardo Serra, AFC (photo by Frank Masi, SMPSP, courtesy of Touchstone Pictures).

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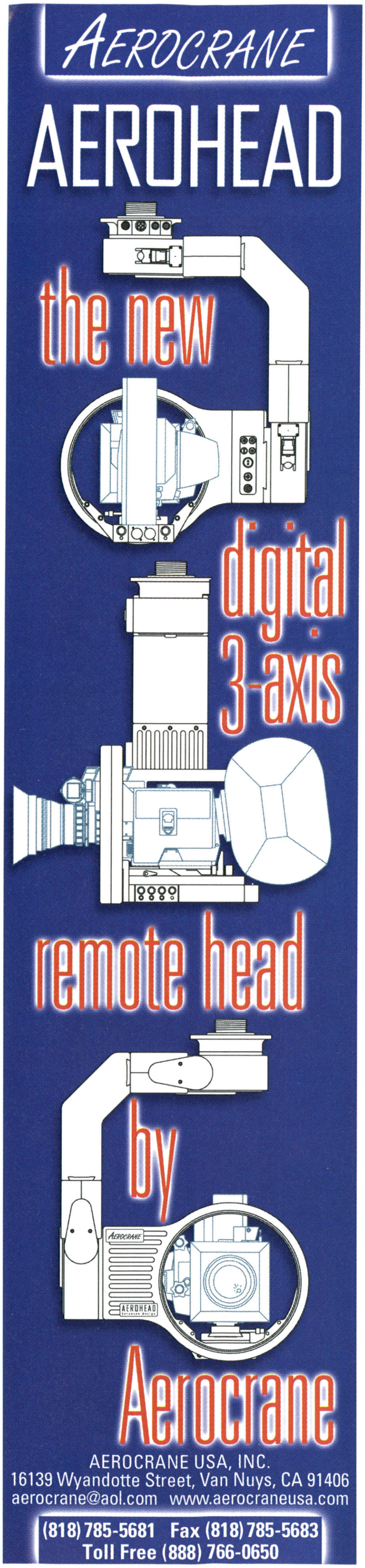

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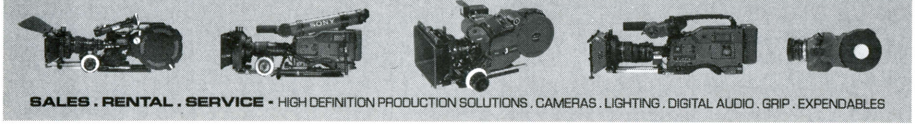
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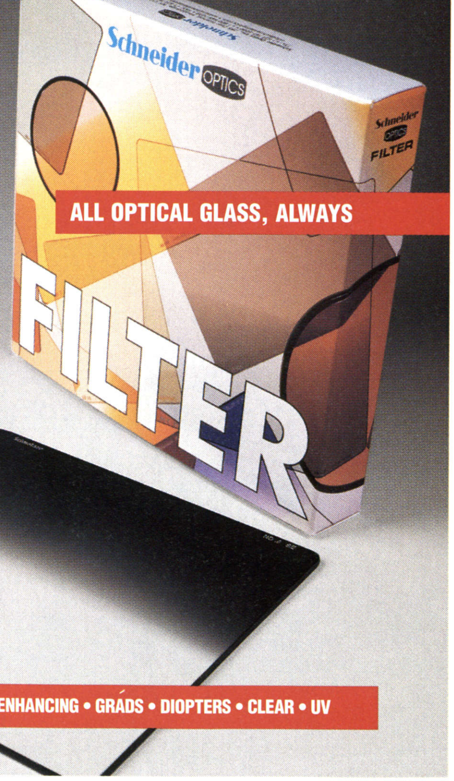

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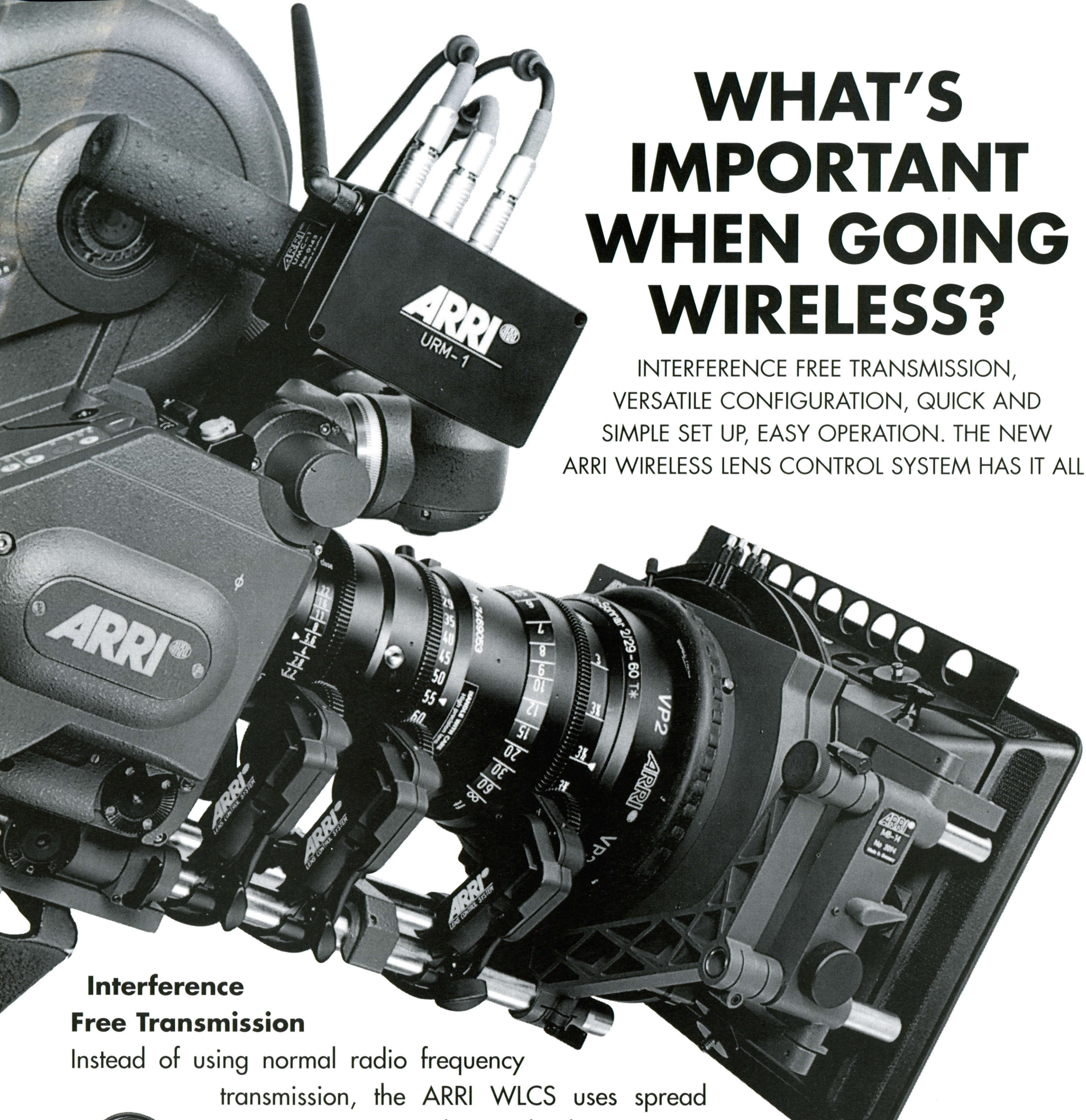

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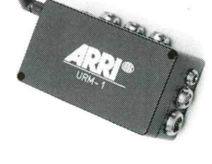
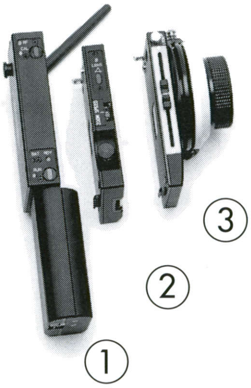
Quick and Simple Set Up



All components easily attach to the camera or snap together. When powered up, the system automatically recognizes the number of individual controllers present on the set and configures itself accordingly. The new lens motors come with adapters for 19mm and 15mm rods and an additional bracket to fit into the tightest configurations with short focal length lenses. The few cables still used are color coded for a fast and accurate connection.



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The Main Control Unit (1) is the signal transmitter and carries the battery.

The Zoom Control (2) and Focus/Iris Control (3) can be snapped onto the main control unit individually or together. The weight of the complete assembled hand control set is only 2.45 lbs.

Up to three main control units can be operated simultaneously, and each main control unit can handle three hand controllers (zoom, focus, iris). Focus and iris can either be controlled from one focus/iris controller or split between two units.

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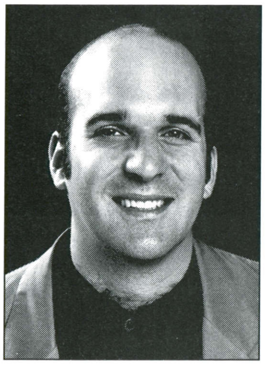

Lately, more than a few pundits have lamented the end of the "truly independent film." In planning this issue of *AC,* however, we found the indie spirit to be alive and well, as evidenced by the war stories recounted by this month's featured filmmakers.

Shadow of the Vampire, an artful and affectionate homage to F.W. Murnau's 1922 expressionist classic *Nosferatu,* certainly reflects the aesthetic integrity of its director, E. Elias Merhige, and cinematographer, Lou Bogue. Despite a modest budget, the duo managed to effectively recreate, down to the last obsessive detail, the look of both Murnau's film and the era in which it was shot. Our coverage of this fascinating project ("Dark Shadows") begins on page 66.

Likewise, no one would dare claim that Maggie Greenwald's *Songcatcher* ("Elusive Tunes," page 76) panders to the mainstream. Acclaimed during its run at the 2000 Sundance Film Festival (where its cast earned a Special Jury Prize for Outstanding Ensemble Performance), the picture tracks a woman's voyage to the heart of the Appalachian Mountains, where she seeks the roots of a distinctly American folk music.

Our monthly departments serve further notice that the indie ethic is indomitable. In Production Slate, the makers of *Skeletons in the Closet* and *A Million Miles* reveal the passion that brought their microbudget projects to fruition; Short Takes highlights the clever holiday charmer *Merry Christmas* and the lyrical dramatic short *Aizea: City of the Wind;* and Global Village salutes *Billy Elliot,* the heartwarming tale of a British boy whose passion for ballet helps him escape the the harsh realities of life in a mining town.

This issue of *AC* also offers a pair of special features that will hopefully prove helpful to both indie filmmakers and more established professionals. "The Rise of Internet Cinema" (page 84) presents an overview of the Web options that exist for ambitious artists, while "The Reel Deal" (page 94) serves up expert advice for cinematographers on how to assemble an effective show reel.

Fittingly enough, even the major-studio pictures we've covered exemplify independent thinking. Director Sam Raimi and cinematographer Jamie Anderson made the most of a tight budget and schedule on the supernatural thriller *The Gift* ("Southern Gothic," page 58), while the the paranormal drama *Unbreakable* teamed a refined European cinematographer, Eduardo Serra, AFC ("Man of Steel," page 38) with a creative and uncompromising American director, M. Night Shyamalan ("Extrasensory Perception," page 48).

Sincerely,

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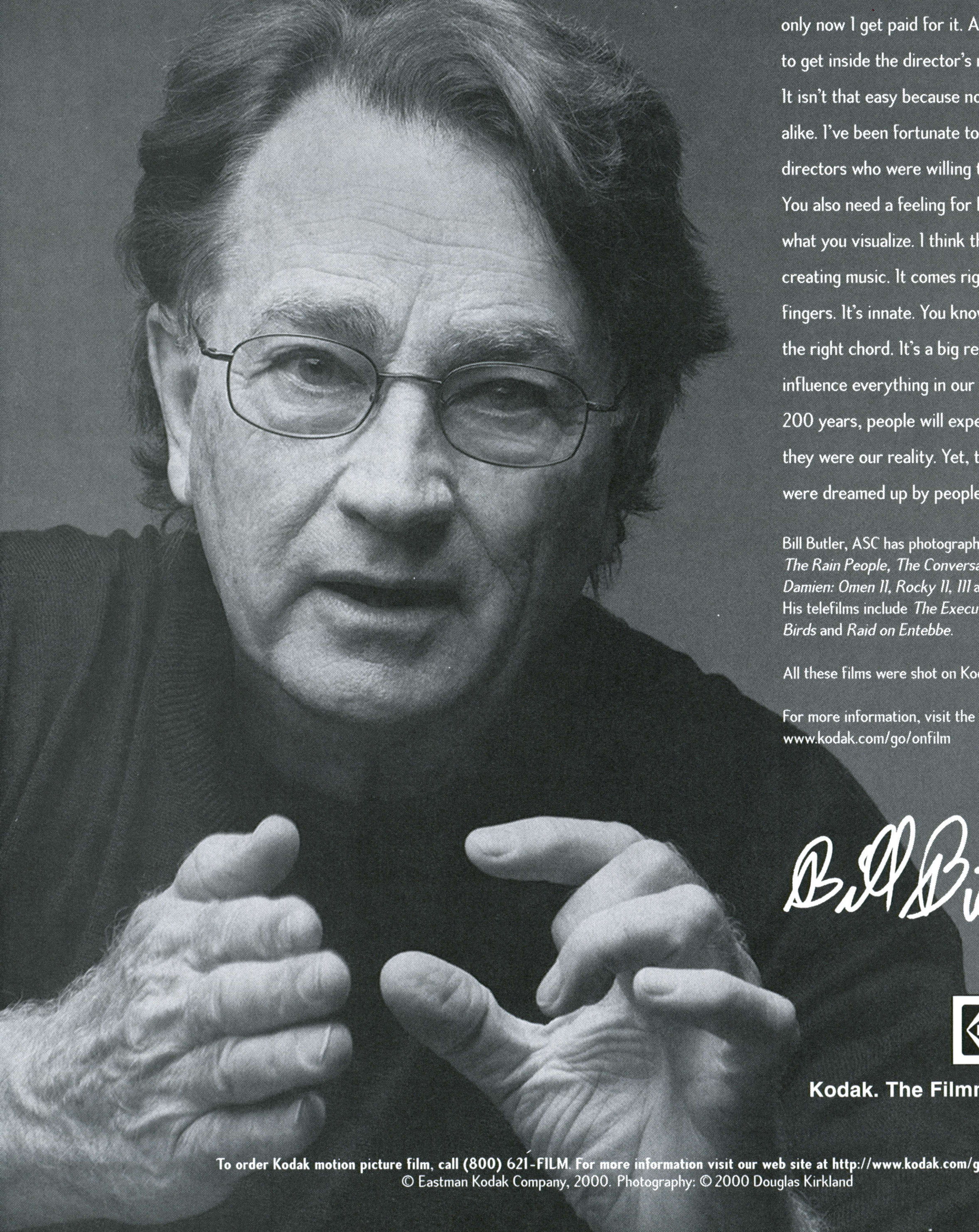

"As a child I spent a lot of time looking out of windows when I should have been reading books. I still fantasize, only now I get paid for it. A cinematographer needs to get inside the director's mind and visualize their story. It isn't that easy because none of them think exactly alike. I've been fortunate to work with many great directors who were willing to break the rules. You also need a feeling for light and an ability to create what you visualize. I think the art of filmmaking is like creating music. It comes right off the tips of your fingers. It's innate. You know when a rhythm strikes the right chord. It's a big responsibility because movies influence everything in our everyday lives. I'm sure in 200 years, people will experience *Jaws* and *Grease* like they were our reality. Yet, they are just stories that were dreamed up by people like myself."

Bill Butler, ASC has photographed such classic features as *The Rain People, The Conversation, Jaws, Lipstick, Grease, Damien: Omen II, Rocky II, III* and *IV, Anaconda* and *Biloxi Blues.* His telefilms include *The Execution of Private Slovik, The Thorn Birds* and *Raid on Entebbe.*

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Letters

Been There, Done That

Jay Holben's piece on this season's *Earth: Final Conflict* ("To Boldly Go...," *AC* October 2000), which covered the ins and outs of trailblazing with the new Sony 24p cameras, was both balanced and well-informed. Co-directors of photography Moxness and Durnan have amply demonstrated that the new technology doesn't — and shouldn't — frighten them. It was obvious, however, that they were completely unaware of the role certain craftsmen play in video production. They were keenly aware of the role and importance of the telecine colorist in the film-capture process, but have no idea that in the video world, there is traditionally an equivalent to the colorist on set called the video operator or video controller. Most film people remained uninformed about this fact.

The video operator (VO) is not to be confused with the Sony "tech" referred to in the article, who was present for the first several days of shooting [with the new camera]. The VO is the cinematographer's color timer in the field. It's commendable that Mssrs. Moxness and Durnan spoke of waveforms, detail level, knee point and slope and the like with some authority, but are we to believe that they have a true understanding of the camera's dozens of operational parameters? It is the VO's responsibility to make these options known to the cinematographer for any given scene, to demonstrate them, and to advise him of any downside to their use. Further, it is his responsibility to maintain visual continuity from shot to shot, even and especially when shooting out of sequence. Setup of the color-grading high-definition monitor is an important part of the VO's duties, because that is ultimately the cinematographer's primary reference. Lighting a scene to a mis-adjusted monitor can bring a cinematographer nothing but grief.

This is all meant to merely inform my film brethren of the role of a valuable video crew member. I don't expect that VOs will be added to crews as more episodic productions go to 24p — plain, old, hide-bound tradition will prevent that. ("What? Drop an AC to add a VO? I don't think so.") I only hope that as more producers, directors and cinematographers "discover" video tools, they bear in mind that some of us have made handsome livings at this work for a good, long while. And just maybe we've been there and done that already.

— Mark Sandford
Redondo Beach, CA

Now Just a Digital Second...

I read with some surprise the article about the digital post of *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* by Bob Fisher (October 2000). We at Digital Film Lab in Copenhagen have posted 18 longform productions using the "digital intermediate" process over the last three years. Six U.K. productions (three of which were full features) have gone through our system, and we are currently working on four features. We have recorded over five million frames to interneg, and the digital-intermediate process is widely accepted as the new postproduction standard in Scandinavia. We are opening a facility in London in November.

The first full feature to go through the system was the Swedish film *Zingo* (from Super 16) in the spring of 1998. This was before *Pleasantville*, of which only 60 percent was digitally posted. So the Coen brothers' film is not a "landmark film," as claimed in the article. Some productions that have used the digital-grading possibilities extensively are: *RAT*, directed by Steve Barron; *Wisconsin Death Trip* (Super 16, mixed black-and-white and color), directed by James Marsh; *In Absentia*, directed by

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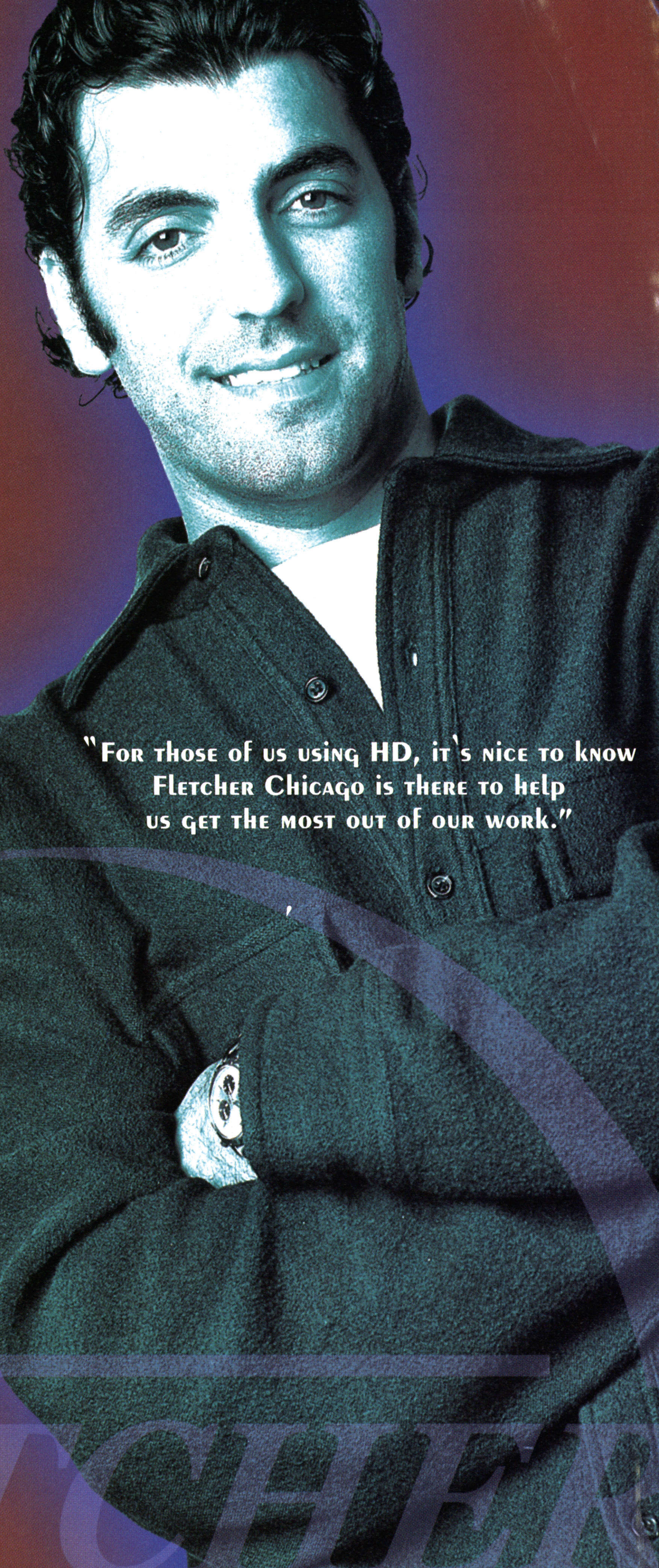
"From the first time I saw it, I knew I wanted to shoot a feature in HD. I'm attracted to its unique clarity and I envisioned a hybrid of digital acquisition and film processing. We approached the production as you would a project originating on film. That is, we worked with a talented film DP and an experienced gaffer and we hired full camera, grip and electric crews. We took the time to light the scenes right and we discovered a whole new look. We achieved some of the warmth, depth and dimension of film with the HD qualities of intense detail, brilliant color saturation and amazing low light sensitivity. The overall budget and cash flow advantages were there too. Compared to some of my earlier projects, I can now appreciate the higher shooting ratios and the benefits of real time monitoring on the set that HD affords us. Shooting in HD is new territory for independents and that poses new risks as well. It's nice to know that there are resources out there and people willing to support our efforts and act as production partners. Fletcher Chicago is one of those resources. They pay attention to the independent filmmaker. They're present at the festivals and the industry events and they have a genuine interest in the creative process. Fletcher is committed to educating the industry on the advantages of high definition and the special needs that the format demands. For those of us using this new medium, it's nice to know they are there for us and they help us get the most out of our work."



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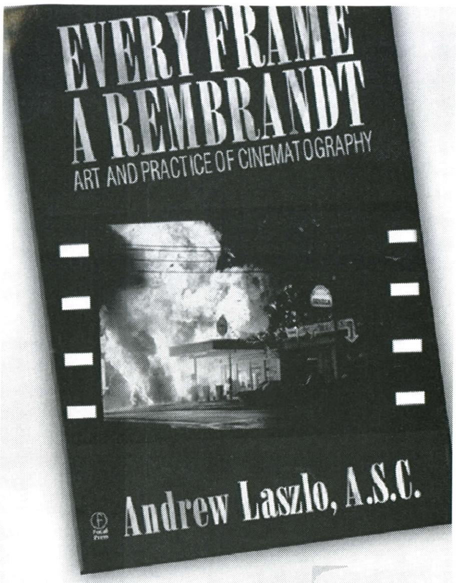

This book examines the art and craft of motion-picture photography through a veteran professional cinematographer's personal experiences on five major motion pictures, each selected to illustrate a particular series of challenges for the photographer.

CONTENTS: Southern Comfort; The Warriors; First Blood; Streets of Fire; Innerspace

ISBN 024080399X : 240pp : 6 x 9.25 In. : 12 color photos : 39 b/w photos : 6 line illustrations :

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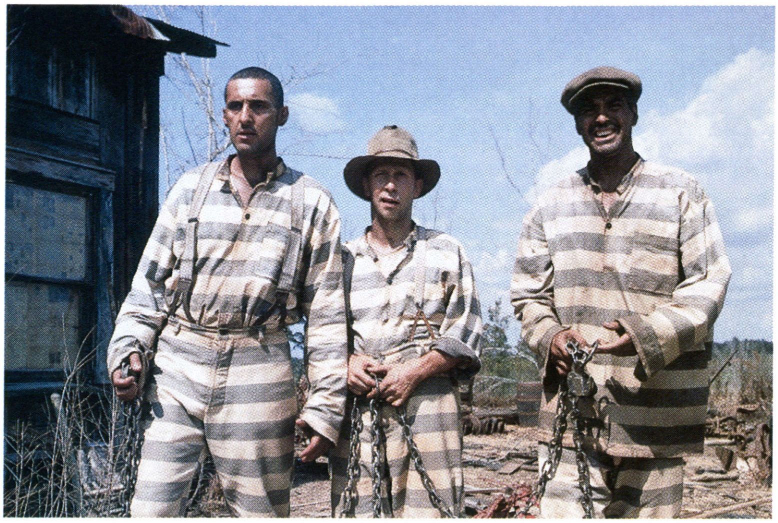

the Quay brothers; *Flashing Lights*, (Super 35 to 'scope) directed by Anders Thomas Jensen; *Honolulu Baby*, directed by Maurizio Niketti (Super 35 to 'scope), and *Wilfred*, directed by Peter Kershaw.

As for quality, comparisons between the digital and optical routes have been done eight times by different cinematographers and laboratories and included all formats (Super 16, 35 and Super 35, both normal aspect and 'scope). In all cases, the print off the digitally derived negative has been judged superior by far to the optical route in terms of resolution, especially when a format change is involved (like a Super 16 "blow up" and anamorphic squeeze).

— Kris Kolodziejski, CEO
Digital Film Lab, Copenhagen

Bob Fisher responds: Thank you for your comments. In my article, I referred to a number of feature-length films that went through a digital-intermediate process and were theatrically distributed. I selected examples I was aware of because I had written about them; I would be interested to hear more about the projects to which you refer. Also, I am reasonably certain that substantially more than 60 percent of Pleasantville *was digitized for look creation.*

When I wrote that O Brother, Where Art Thou? *is a landmark film, I was referring to the fact that the technology was used as an extension of cinematography by the cinematographer. In too many cases, the cinematographer's role has been nonexistent or diminished when all or parts of his films have been digitized. By contrast, the Coens assigned that job to Roger Deakins, and this was the first I'd heard of a cinematographer being given that responsibility.*

The comments about 2K image quality were made by Deakins, who said this is a subjective issue that depends on the project and the cinematographer. Clearly, he has earned the right to state an opinion on this issue.

O Brother, Are We Bummed…

Some of you may have noticed that the opening photo in our October spread on the Coen brothers' film *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* (page 36) is marred by a pair of electronic lines that were apparently generated during the magazine's pre-press scanning phase. With apologies to the Coens (whose films we really admire), cinematographer Roger Deakins, ASC, BSC (a good friend to the magazine), unit photographer Melissa Sue Gordon (who always shoots great photos), and our publicity pals at Disney (who give us nothing but beautiful slides), we hereby present a pristine version of the photo for your perusal. ■

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Billy Elliot: A Triumphant Grand Jeté

by Rachael K. Bosley

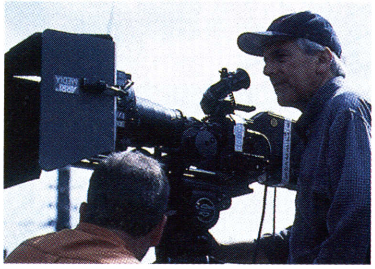
An exuberant Billy (Jamie Bell) dances home after experiencing his first ballet class in *Billy Elliot.* Cinematographer Brian Tufano, BSC (pictured at right) says the toughest aspect of the production was making the dance sequences appear organic to Billy's working-class environment.

A boy who aspires to dance ballet doesn't emerge from a mining town in northern England every day, and cinematographer Brian Tufano, BSC says that this was one reason he was instantly charmed by the story of *Billy Elliot.* "It's a very off-the-wall subject," Tufano offers, "and I liked the writing very much."

No stranger to off-the-wall subjects, Tufano brought visual panache to the low-budget hits *Trainspotting* (see *AC* August '96) and *Shallow Grave,* and his feature credits also include *Dreamscape, The Lords of Discipline* and *Quadrophenia.* He says *Billy Elliot* offered him a chance to do two things that have become almost second nature: collaborate with a first-time film director (in this case, veteran theater director Stephen Daldry), and create first-rate production value with a very small budget. "Our biggest challenges were time and money, which is always true of smaller films," he notes.

Although *Billy Elliot* tells an intimate story, it is set against the backdrop of the coal-miners' strike of 1984 — the longest national strike in the history of the British working class. Billy (Jamie Bell) lives with his widower father (Gary Lewis) and cranky older brother (Jamie Draven), both of whom work in the mines, and the film toes a difficult line by tempering Billy's increasing passion for dance with the growing tension and violence created by the strike.

Tufano says he was chiefly concerned with how to present the film's dance numbers so that they would appear organic to their settings. "We wanted a documentary-style realism; the dancing had to grow out of the environment," the cinematographer says. "The hope was that the dance numbers wouldn't look out of place. They had to appear as if they were part of what was going on in Billy's mind." He adds with a laugh that the film's tight shooting schedule helped him accomplish this: "It was all done very quickly, so the numbers have a roughness to them that makes them fit in and flow with the rest of the material."



Photos by Giles Keyte and Peter Mountain, courtesy of Universal Studios.

The youth center where Billy first witnesses a ballet class — while he is failing miserably at boxing — was intended to stand in sharp contrast to the cramped areas in which the rest of his life unfolds. "We framed scenes set in Billy's home and neighborhood very tightly, because we wanted to suggest he was trapped in his environment," Tufano explains. "Stephen [Daldry] wanted the scenes set in the youth center to have a lighter quality, a kind of heightened realism, because dance is how Billy escapes his environment and enters a world of his own." Although the filmmakers initially planned to build a set for the youth-center interior, they found a

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Billy's dance instructor, Mrs. Wilkinson (Julie Walters), begins to help him secretly prepare to audition for London's Royal Ballet School. This scene was originally written as an elaborate, moonlit dance number that would take a full day to film, but a freak storm ruined Tufano's nighttime-lighting rig at the last minute, forcing the crew to re-cable an afternoon-lighting rig. Tufano eventually shot the scene in less than 30 minutes.

suitable location northwest of London. "It was a Victorian school or institution, and interestingly enough, we found a plaque on one of the walls which said that Charlie Chaplin had been a pupil or resident there," the cinematographer says. "We filmed in the room that had been the gymnasium."

One key dance sequence in that location was shot especially quickly — far more quickly, in fact, than the filmmakers had intended. It is the only scene in the film in which Billy dances with his instructor (Julie Walters), who has offered to help him secretly prepare to audition for the Royal Ballet School in London. According to Tufano, the scene was originally set at night, with moonlight streaming in the windows of the old gymnasium and silhouetting the actors. "[Choreographer] Peter Darling, Jamie and Julie spent about three weeks rehearsing the scene," he recalls. "I watched the rehearsals and we developed a shot list and planned the lighting. We were due to spend a Saturday shooting the scene, and we arrived early that day to rig it. We used 20'-by-20' black drapes to tent the end of the gymnasium where the windows were, and we'd planned to create strong, heightened moonlight with two 12K HMIs mounted outside on extremely high stands — the terrain was rugged, and there was actually a sort of moat around the building, so everything was on high stands and 6- to 8-foot parallels.

"Suddenly, just as we were ready to shoot, there was a freak, hurricane-like windstorm that blew the black drapes and the 12Ks into the football field next to our building! By the time we rescued all of the equipment, we had less than an hour to relight and shoot the scene." The cinematographer turned to the lights he had rigged for late-afternoon scenes at that location — a platform that ran the length of the building and held five 12K HMIs, which had been protected from the windstorm because it was tucked under the tents. "That rig was still intact, and we had about 15 minutes to relight the place, so I had my crew re-cable those 12Ks, and we literally shot the scene in less than 30 minutes," Tufano says with a touch of amazement. "We'd planned some slow-motion sequences and other things — you have no idea! — but it became a matter of just getting enough light to shoot the scene."

Tufano used an Arriflex BL-4s as his A-camera and an Aaton 35-III as his B-camera, along with Zeiss lenses — his standard package, he says. "The compactness and versatility of it really suits the way I work," he notes.

The cinematographer admits that zooms are not his favorite lenses, but he used one to photograph a critical moment for Billy's father. Determined to give his youngest son a chance to escape their town and pursue his dream, he decides to cross the picket lines and go back to the mine. "I wanted a high angle, and we didn't have a crane, so I just used a Ladderpod and put a zoom on the camera — the zoom lens does have its place and its moments," he says. "We see Billy's father walk toward the coach that will take him to the mine, and we see the turmoil going on inside him. Then, just for a moment, he turns away and looks out, and he sees the sea, because the town is right there on the shore. That moment conveys the narrative visually — [showing us] that his mind is beginning to open."

Tufano primarily used Kodak Vision 200T 5274 and Vision 500T 5279 on the production, but he needed the extra speed of Vision 800T 5289 for the film's final sequence, which is set several years later and shows Billy's father and brother arriving in London to see Billy's starring performance in *Swan Lake*. "By that time, our budget was just about gone, so we shot those scenes with virtually no added lights — and we had one night to do it," Tufano recalls. "The scenes set within the London Underground were shot with available light, and I used a couple of 500-watt floodlights and two large Mag-Lite flashlights to illuminate the exterior of the theater as they arrived there."

Tufano followed *Billy Elliot* with *Late Night Shopping*, another venture with a first-time film director, Saul Metzstein. "Saul started as a production runner on *Shallow Grave* — he picked me up at the airport!" he notes with a laugh. "I enjoy working with new directors. Their enthusiasm is refreshing, and it really fires me up." ■

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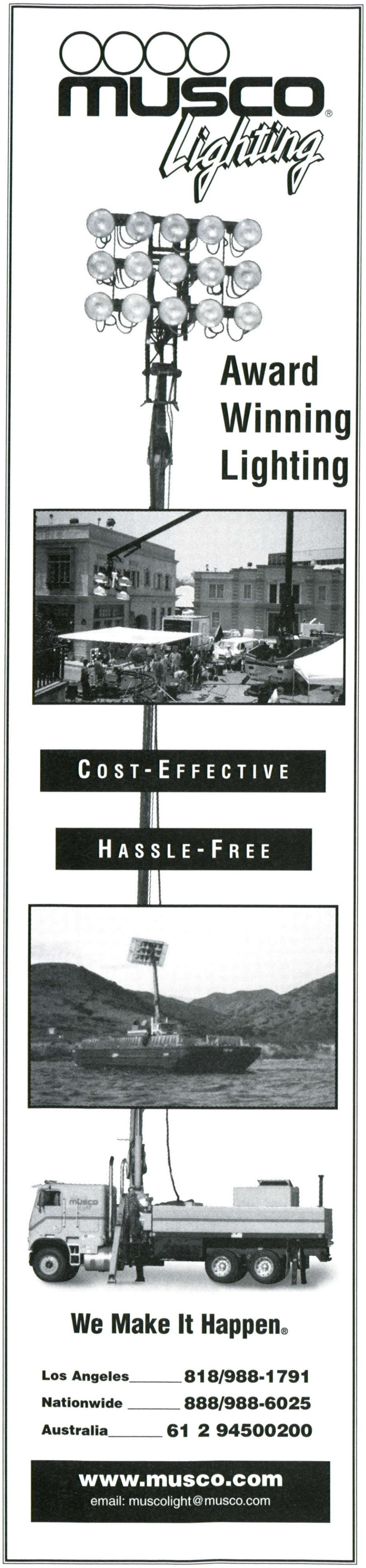

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DVD Playback

by Chris Pizzello

Braveheart (1995)
2.35:1 (16 x 9 Enhanced),
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and Dolby Surround 2.0
Paramount, $29.99

In his director's commentary on Paramount's new *Braveheart* DVD, Mel Gibson asserts that one of the production's most valuable assets was its chiropractor. He's only half-kidding — his actors were pummeled, flung off horses and trampled by the hundreds in amazing medieval battle scenes that sometimes took six weeks to shoot. Gibson displayed considerable *cajones* in directing this sprawling three-hour epic, which chronicles Scottish freedom fighter William Wallace's bloody rebellion against the British in the 13th century. His daring paid off, as the film went on to win the Academy Award for Best Picture.

The alternately gorgeous and horrific images captured by cinematographer John Toll, ASC (who earned the Oscar for Best Cinematography) have received a near-immaculate transfer from Paramount. Working in the anamorphic format, Toll captures both the natural beauty of the Scottish Highlands' awesome vistas, as well as the sheer squalor of life in the 13th century. He was given some help in the latter regard by near-constant rain that the production had no choice but to work through — soon after arriving in Scotland, the crew discovered that they were shooting in a region with the highest precipitation level in all of Europe.

A making-of documentary on the DVD fills in some of the sketchy historical details of Wallace's life, while also offering the amusing sight of Gibson on location reading from a fake guide entitled *A Beginner's Guide to Directing the Epic*. The star had to feel overwhelmed by his dual acting and directing chores during the massive undertaking, and he never misses a chance to praise Toll during his genial audio commentary. Gibson candidly points out sequences that were improvised in 30 minutes but look as though they were labored over for days. For instance, a scene in which guilt-ridden Robert the Bruce (Angus McFayden) walks among seemingly hundreds of dead Scottish warriors was achieved on the spot merely by Toll's selective use of camera angles and fog. Gibson also details the jump cuts and stutter cuts he employed in the editing room to further juice the battle footage, and he gently ribs Steven Spielberg for allegedly lifting the technique and employing it to much more deliberate effect in *Saving Private Ryan*.

Jurassic Park:
Collector's Edition (1993)
1.85:1 (16 x 9 Enhanced),
Available in Dolby Digital 5.1
or DTS
Universal, $26.98

Speaking of Spielberg, *Jurassic Park* saw the renowned director don his Pure Entertainer cap, returning to the man-versus-leviathan suspense of his '70s films *Duel* and *Jaws*. While this audience-pleaser lacks the subtle human dynamics and existential edge that made those early films classics, it's still the Rolls-Royce of "thrill ride" cinema, thanks to Spielberg's pure, inimitable visual storytelling. It's customary for effects-driven films to turn horribly rote between the CGI shots, but Spielberg maintains the energy even when the dinosaurs are offscreen; there's nary a wasted shot or dull moment in the tight, efficient *Jurassic Park*.

Universal's DVD transfer is excellent, presenting the film's dynamic, high-key images (shot by Dean Cundey, ASC)

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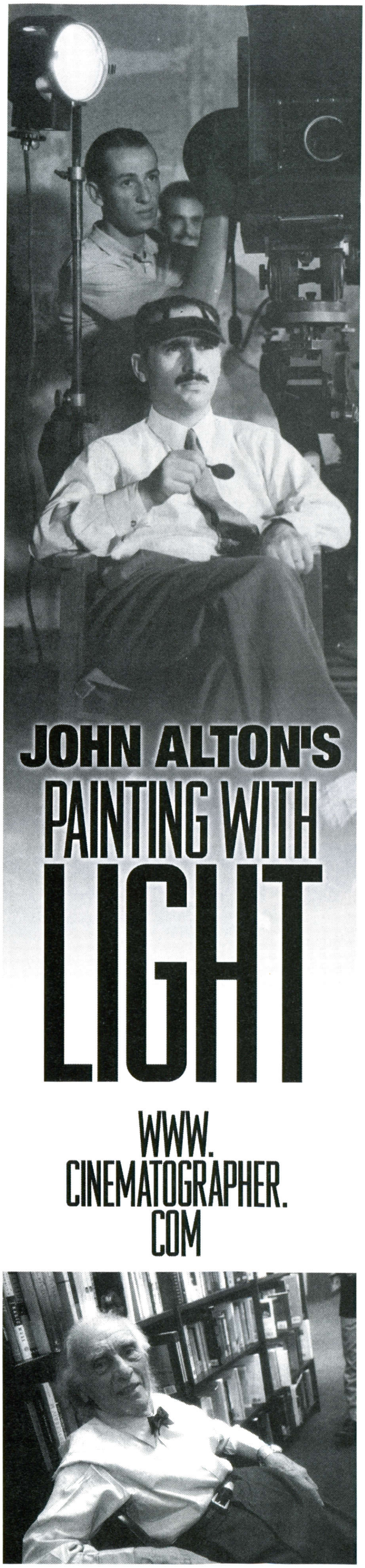

with superb clarity and brilliant color saturation. There's no commentary from Spielberg, but the disc makes up for it with compelling supplements. First up is a well-organized documentary that breaks the film up into its preproduction, location shooting and postproduction phases. The documentary offers a particularly fascinating chronicle of the good-natured competition among effects gurus Dennis Muren, ASC; Stan Winston, Michael Lantieri, and Phil Tippett to achieve the most seamless onscreen dinosaurs in history. Spielberg cannily adopted Tippett's observation, "I think I'm extinct," into the film after Tippett — who was lobbying for the use of his own "go-motion" dinosaurs — got his first look at Muren's groundbreaking CGI creations.

Elsewhere on the disc are a few fly-on-the-wall videotapings of Spielberg's early prep meetings, and a sampling of the surprisingly detailed go-motion footage created by Tippett to flesh out Spielberg's storyboards (which are also included). In addition, the disc offers production photos, a series of trailers (including a teaser for *Jurassic Park III,* slated for release next summer), a useful "dinosaur encyclopedia" and even a brief look at the sound creations of the film's Foley artists. But the most insightful moment of the extras occurs in the "location scout" feature, when, for a few moments, the viewer is brought into the mind of one of the world's greatest directors as he dreams up a key shot for *Jurassic Park* with the aid of a video camera.

Visions of Light: The Art of Cinematography (1992)
1.78:1, Dolby Digital Mono
Image Entertainment, $24.99

The history of cinematography is a subject that could easily stand up to an exhaustive, 10-hour PBS series by Ken Burns. But the genius stroke of the 90-minute *Visions of Light* was to handle the topic with the breadth to satisfy cinematography buffs — who can be an exacting bunch — as well as the populist panache to appeal to the casual moviegoer who ventures to the cineplex once a week. This documentary, directed by Todd McCarthy, Arnold Glassman and Stuart Samuels and photographed by Nancy Schreiber, ASC, pays tribute to the gifted artists (a tag humbly refuted by many cinematographers) who are responsible for the simple pleasure we all feel as we're swept up in the towering images of the big screen.

Visions of Light smartly bypasses intrusive third-party narration and goes right to the source of cinematography wisdom — dozens of the greatest living cameramen in the world, who guide viewers through the most important developments in the history of the moving image, from the freewheeling early silents to the French New Wave to the 1970s "New York style" and beyond. Renowned works of cinematography such as *Citizen Kane* and *The Conformist* are highlighted, but attention is also paid to more obscure but equally important visual achievements like 1955's film-noir classic *The Big Combo.*

Naturally, this disc is rife with fascinating set stories. One of the standouts is provided by William Fraker, ASC, who recalls director Roman Polanski's insistence on partially hiding actress Ruth Gordon in a doorway for a shot in *Rosemary's Baby.* The cinematographer only figured out why the director was so adamant after seeing the film in a theater and noticing 800 audience members simultaneously craning their necks sideways in a vain attempt to get a full glimpse of Gordon.

Visions of Light contains no extras, but the film is like a particularly juicy 90-minute DVD supplement. The only drawback to the disc is the sometimes rough quality of the brilliantly edited film clips — a shame, when one considers the pristine DVDs now available of many of the highlighted films. As *Visions of Light* was released in 1992, one can only hope for an updated version featuring the next generation of star cinematographers and the visual innovations of the '90s and beyond. ■

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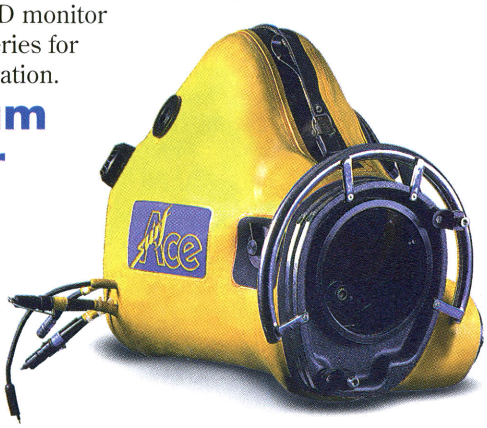

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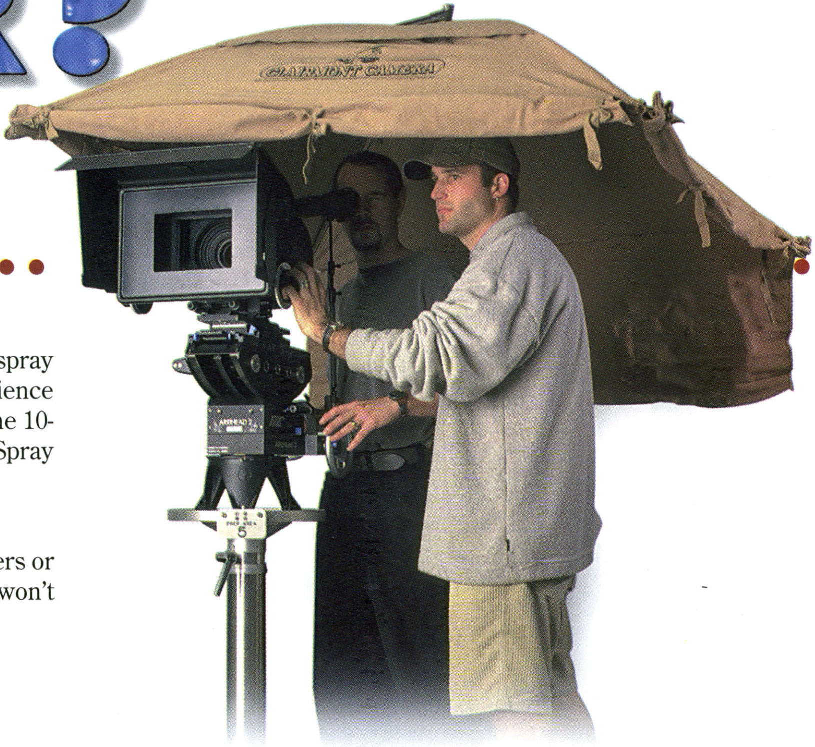

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Production Slate

Above: In this frame from the film, Will (Treat Williams) discovers the disturbed scribblings of his son, Seth. This scene originally occurred in the daytime but was edited together with Will's search through the room to form one continuous scene over the course of a night. "In post, we gave it an amber look and crunched it," says Barrett. "Will is still silhouetted, and it sold effectively as a night scene." Right: In another frame grab, Will and Tina (Linda Hamilton) share a kiss during dinner while bathed in soft, diffuse illumination provided by a booklight.

Bare Bones

by Douglas Bankston

Although its makers received support and financing from Artisan Entertainment and Nu Image, *Skeletons in the Closet* remains an independent film in the truest sense of the term. Written and produced by husband-and-wife screenwriters Wayne and Donna Powers (*Deep Blue Sea*), *Skeletons* was directed by Wayne and shot in his hometown of Jackson, New Hampshire, over 19 days. During production, Wayne took full advantage of free locations and help from friends and family — in fact, his elementary-school principal served as his location manager.

Despite a tight budget of just $1.5 million, Powers managed to nab a high-profile cast. Treat Williams and Jonathan Jackson portray Will and Seth, a father and teenage son struggling to maintain a relationship many years after a tragic fire claimed both their home and the life of the boy's mentally unstable mother. Seth blames his father for her death, but over time, he has repressed the truth: that his mother physically and emotionally abused him and deliberately set the fire outside his room. Although he survived the blaze unscathed, Seth suffered deep emotional scars that result in cryptic behavior. When three people go missing, all of the circumstantial evidence points to Seth, and Will's paranoia makes it increasingly difficult for him to believe that his son is innocent. Meanwhile, Tina (Linda Hamilton), a woman with her sights set on Will, gets caught in the middle.

Because of money and time constraints, the choice to shoot the film on high-definition (HD) video was made early on, although the filmmakers briefly flirted with the idea of shooting it Dogma-style. Shooting in HD would allow *Skeleton's* bare-bones crew to set up quickly and use a smaller lighting package. After viewing numerous demo reels, Powers found the right cinematographer for the job in Michael Barrett (*Safe Men*, *The Suburbans*, *75 Degrees in July*).

"As far as the choice to shoot in high definition, everyone seemed to know about it except me," Barrett admits with a chuckle. "Wayne sprung it on me in the middle of my interview. It made sense because of the schedule's limitations, and I was definitely interested in trying it — it seemed like a great opportunity. Of course, there is the whole stigma of shooting on video, and everyone was afraid to be seen in any photos with the cameras!"

The visual style of Michael Mann's films, particularly *The Insider*, influenced Powers and Barrett, who opted to shoot coverage with two cameras whenever possible. Most often, the cameras would shoot the action from

Frame grabs courtesy of Wayne Powers.

Erin Brockovich

best picture	PRODUCED BY DANNY DeVITO MICHAEL SHAMBERG STACEY SHER
best actress	JULIA ROBERTS
best supporting actor	ALBERT FINNEY AARON ECKHART
best supporting actress	MARG HELGENBERGER
best direction	STEVEN SODERBERGH
best screenplay	WRITTEN DIRECTLY FOR THE SCREEN SUSANNAH GRANT
best cinematography	ED LACHMAN, ASC
best film editing	ANNE V. COATES
best art direction	PHILIP MESSINA PRODUCTION DESIGNER KRISTEN TOSCANO MESSINA SET DECORATOR
best costume design	JEFFREY KURLAND
best makeup	SUSAN CABRAL-EBERT MAKEUP DEPARTMENT HEAD RICHARD DEAN BONNIE CLEVERING
best sound	THOMAS CAUSEY PRODUCTION SOUND MIXER LARRY BLAKE MICHAEL KELLER RE-RECORDING MIXERS
best sound editing	LARRY BLAKE SUPERVISING SOUND EDITOR
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David Ansen, NEWSWEEK

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Above: In this frame from the film, Will takes a closer look at a penny-token machine, another clue that leads Will to believe his son is guilty of murder. 1.2K Pars were aimed into the yellowish awning over the patio to provide background ambience. A 750-watt Zip was placed low to the ground and aimed through diffusion at Tina. A small Kino Flo on Will boosted the light emanating from the machine. Right: In another frame grab, an overly stressed and paranoid Will nearly whacks his boss. A film-look software process was applied by The Post Group, whose staffers added motion blur and a film grain structure that resembles Kodak EXR 50D 5245 stock.

roughly the same angle using lenses with different focal lengths; occasionally, the cameras would be used to capture opposing coverage. One technique used in several scenes consisted of locking off one camera with a wider lens, while using the second camera to shoot a handheld, long-lens close-up of the same action. This helped to create a sense of uneasiness in the viewer's attitude toward Will by presenting a still shot of him followed by a cut to the handheld close-up.

The small production's camera package, obtained from Rule Broadcasting Systems in Boston, comprised three Sony HD-700 cameras equipped with Canon and Fujinon zoom lenses. Jeffrey Hunt, SOC served as the show's A-camera/Steadicam operator, while Barrett operated the B-camera. "I don't know if we could have done as much shooting in 19 days without that other camera," Barrett says by telephone from New York, where he is currently shooting *The Perfect You.* "Jeff found a way to set up that second camera for almost every other shot. Usually by the end of the day, our setups numbered more than 30."

The third Sony camera was rigged for Steadicam use at all times, and Powers notes that the liberal use of the gyrostablized rig was inspired by the POV camera style of Roman Polanski's films. "The Steadicam worked best for us in following Treat Williams's character into a room," he says. "We, as viewers, are seeing things and discovering them at the same time he is."

"There was no HD output for the Steadicam monitor," Barrett points out. "Zbigniew Twarog at Rule worked on it night and day to attach a YEM down-converter to the side of the camera. When we showed up, he said, 'I've got good news and bad news. The good news is that I was able to convert it; the bad news is that it's the size of a Volkswagen!' When the whole thing was flying, it was bigger than a Panavision camera with Primo lenses. That's not saying it weighed more — it was bulky but rather light, and Jeff quickly got used to it. The camera was moving in every scene, and we didn't even have a dolly."

In addition to frequently manning the second camera, Barrett also had to help his skeletal lighting crew move and set up equipment. "I had a crew of two guys, one electrician and one grip," he says. "We also had a couple of high-school students who occasionally swung with us. Vincent Wren was my gaffer; he had worked as a best boy for me on a feature I'd done the previous summer, but *Skeletons* was the first project he'd ever gaffed on. Bill Brady Majors was my grip. They both worked incredibly hard, and we had a really good time. I look forward to working with them again."

Like the crew, the lighting package was also small-scale, consisting of three 1.2K Pars, two pocket Pars, a couple of small Kino Flos and a small number of tungsten units — "basically, everything that can plug into a wall," says Barrett with a laugh. "It worked out well, because we found that in HD, you can have too much light. You want to open up the lens as much as possible to limit the format's seemingly infinite depth of field, which screams 'video.' It was something we were very conscious of. We tried to stay on as long a lens as possible. Unfortunately, the lenses we were using seemed to be designed more for the automatic focus of the camera, and the lens markings weren't great. My two assistants became a bit frustrated at times. Although I had been warned against lens diffusion when shooting HD for film transfer, there were a few times when I couldn't help myself, and we would use the lightest grades of Classic Soft filters.

"Anticipating five days of color-correction gave me more freedom with the lighting and saved us a lot of time — specifically in locations with fluorescents," he continues. "Usually I might change out the fixtures with color-

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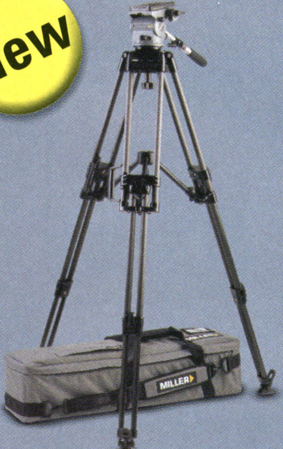

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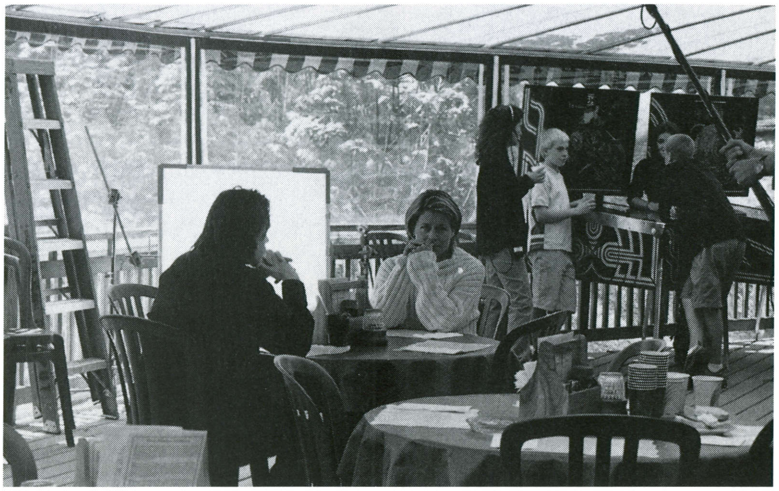

Top: Seth (Jonathan Jackson) has an apprehensive heart-to-heart chat with Tina about his paranoid father. Bottom: Director Wayne Powers (far right) and cinematographer Michael Barrett try to keep pace with A-camera/Steadicam operator Jeffrey Hunt, SOC. The Steadicam was used frequently to "play on that audience question of 'Do we trust Will's point of view or should we look at it from the point of view that Will is not exactly a sane person?' — which is the second possibility in the film," notes Powers. "With the Steadicam, we were able to use much less equipment than we would have needed with dollies and tracks."

Top photo by Donna Powers. Bottom photo by Bill Brady Majors.

corrected tubes, but with tape-to-tape, I knew I could bring the actors' skin tones back to normal while leaving the fluorescents as they were. All we had to do was match our sources to the existing lighting."

The type of lighting units that were available did have an impact on Barrett's approach. "The prospect of balancing the windows for day interior illumination was daunting," he explains. "I couldn't light to a stop where I could see everything outside, and we didn't have time to gel the windows. Wayne liked the look of papered windows, so we ended up covering most of the windows with sheer lace curtains that we'd blow out.

"Still, there were some pretty extensive Steadicam moves where we would go from outside on a bright sunny day to inside, and I only had 1.2K Pars to light with," the cinematographer says. "We did a lot of iris pulls — something that usually makes me a bit nervous. One nice thing about working in HD was that we could play back our footage and see how we'd done; the monitor was incredibly important, since that was my lighting reference. One of the most difficult things was to break my habit of lighting through the camera, because the HD camera has a black-and-white, fairly contrasty viewing system."

Whenever possible, the shooting day was scheduled to take place when the exteriors would be in shadow, in order to help balance interiors and exteriors. Sometimes the production was blessed with overcast skies. In those situations, the interior lighting was built up enough so that anything outside the windows would read. "I tried to keep everything really soft," Barrett recalls. "A lot of lighting was done through 4-by-4 frames, with maybe a harder back edge for that little specular reflection off the underside of a cheek."

One day, while the filmmakers were shooting a scene in which Seth comes home from a *very* short military stint, a storm rolled in and darkened the skies much earlier than expected. "One Steadicam shot ran the length of the house," Barrett says. "Every single light was burning. I looked at the monitor, and it still looked like daytime! Once that night happened, I think it gave everyone a false sense of security in terms of turning night into day — which, luckily, we didn't have to do again. The main thing that helped us that night was that we had accepted the look of blown-out windows. I had been cautioned early on that once you blow something out on HD, it's almost impossible to bring it back, so I generally shot the movie to be a bit less contrasty than I might normally have done."

One interior dinner scene featuring Will and Tina was staged at sunset to achieve a stylized, picturesque look. The sequence was lit with multiple sources that were similar in color temperature. "Wayne wanted that scene to look very pretty," Barrett recalls. "I matched the sunset warmth [to an extent] with a tungsten lamp in the foreground, because I knew that when we cut in I'd want some warm light on the inside. I then gelled up one of the 1.2K Pars to produce a really hard backlight. Once I had the hardlight, I used a booklight for fill — most often, a 1,200-watt Par or a pocket Par bounced into a 4-by-4 piece of beadboard and broken by a 4-by-4 light grid frame in front of the board. That approach created a very diffuse, soft and even light."

One of the film's most disquieting scenes occurs when Will ventures into Seth's attic room and notices that one section is freshly painted. By scraping away all night, Will discovers that the paint was hiding the cumulative effect of Seth's abuse, summed up in the words "Mama loves her baby," which are scrawled thousands of times on the walls.

Will's deliberate trek up the stairs and into the room involved a complicated Steadicam move in which the camera leads him up the stairs, becomes his POV in a 360-degree sweep of the room, and then focuses on Will again in a doorway by the fresh paint. "I felt that I needed something to light the scene that would give us a point of interest," Barrett details. "There was one lamp in the ceiling, which gives Will a bit of illumination when he reaches the top of the stairs. I didn't like the idea of having a practical in each area of the room — after all, why would Seth leave all of his lights on? Owing to his torment, I figured I could lay one practical lamp down on its side [and] have it in frame; the light coming out of the top of the shade would light up the desk area, and the light coming out of the bottom would light up the other wall and the mattress on the floor. When Will reaches that doorway, I have him backlit, and at that point you can believe that he's turned on the other source."

Unlike many indie productions, *Skeletons in the Closet* enjoyed a cushy postproduction schedule, including five days of tape-to-tape color timing on a daVinci 2K color corrector at The Post Group in Los Angeles. "Our colorist, Paul Westerbeck, was a terrific guy," Barrett beams. "We had a good time putting all of the contrast back into the movie." Adds Powers, "Michael and I were able to try something, see it immediately and then adjust it immediately in tape-to-tape."

The Post Group suggested using a new film-look process called Film Style that they had acquired from the software company Monsters 5D. The process, which runs on the facility's Inferno, combines the video fields and creates a motion blur that's added to the frames. Film Style also adds a "film grain" of choice, based on all of Eastman Kodak's current stocks. "The one that felt the least like noise and the most like an approximation of grain was the 5245 grain look," Barrett reveals. "Combined with the motion blur, we felt that it was a significant improvement over straight HD. When you look at video, you're very aware that it is not a chemical medium; you're missing the motion of grain, which feels more alive and organic. I think [the process] took away the electronic texture and replaced it with the type of film texture that [viewers] are more used to seeing."

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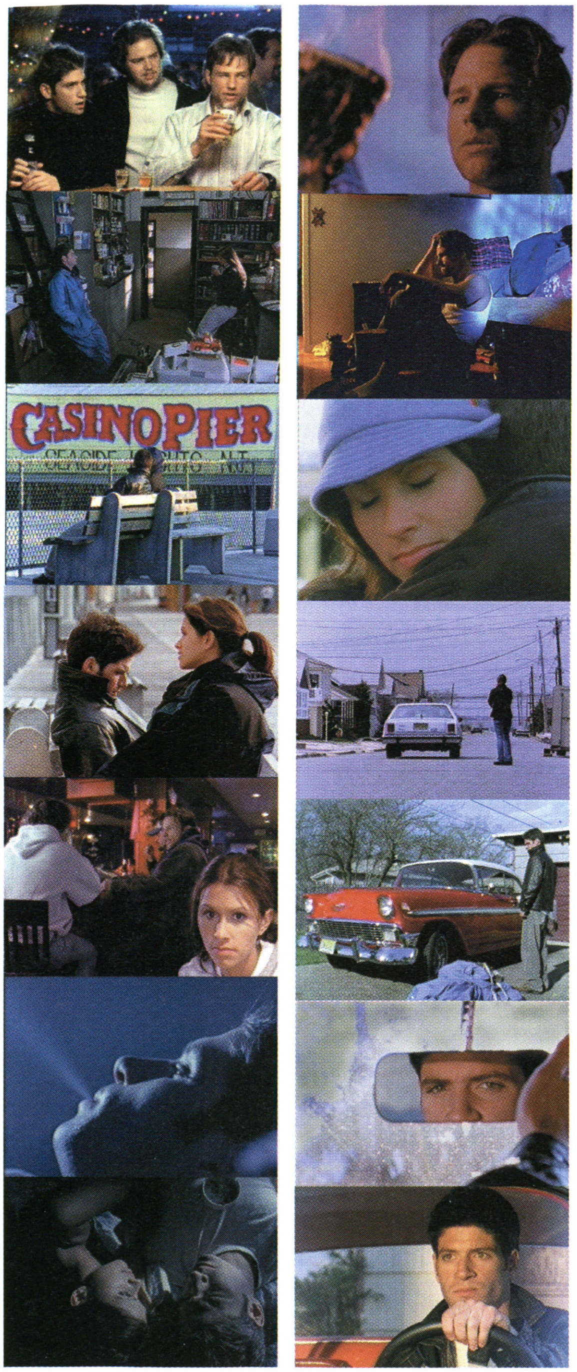


Above: Selected scenes from *A Million Miles,* a coming-of-age tale set in New Jersey. Top right: Setting up a shot, from left, are 1st AC William Miller, cinematographer Patrick J. Donnelly and director/co-writer Bryan Sipe.

Jersey Guys

by Eric Rudolph

Less than 10 years ago, a young film-school dropout named Kevin Smith pawned his comic-book collection to augment the tiny budget of his first feature, *Clerks*, in New Jersey. Since that film's success, ever-younger aspiring filmmakers have been reluctant to let a lack of connections or experience prevent them from making first features. Just recently, Bryan Sipe and Ben Carney, two young men who hail from another suburban New Jersey town, used Smith's example as a source of inspiration. Despite their complete lack of filmmaking experience, the duo managed to bring a heartfelt coming-of-age tale to the big screen.

After finishing their feature-length screenplay for *A Million Miles,* Sipe and Carney subsequently raised $55,000 by soliciting donations from family members, friends and local businesses in and around Toms River, where the two (then 22 and 21 years old, respectively) were raised. Neither had been to film school or even made a short film, and they realized from the start that they needed an experienced hand behind the camera. New York-based filmmaker Patrick J. Donnelly, who served as the project's cinematographer, says the pair's screenplay resonated with his own experience — he grew up near Toms River, and like the central character in *A Million Miles,* he had also struggled with the decision of whether or not to leave a hometown girlfriend to attend school in California.

When Sipe and Carney saw Donnelly's short film *Crashing by Design*, which was shot in the decaying Jersey Shore resort town of Asbury Park, they knew they'd found a filmmaker who shared their vision. Notes Donnelly, "They liked the way the short made the town partly a character and captured the feel of a deserted seaside resort in the winter."

A Million Miles, which was screened twice at this year's Independent Feature Film Market in New York, was directed by Sipe. The plot follows Jim Gordon (portrayed by Carney) and Ford Weston (Ray Jarrell), two men in their early twenties who are already being ground down by the predictability of their lives. The film's wintry seaside universe seems particularly grim. When Jim is accepted by a school in California, however, he is hesitant to leave his hometown, a young woman with whom he has just begun an uncertain relationship, and his longtime friend, Ford.

When Donnelly signed onto the project as cinematographer and agreed to defer payment, he didn't realize that his comparative wealth of filmmaking experience would lead Sipe and Carney to name him supervising producer as well. (Although *A Million Miles* was his first feature as a director of photography, Donnelly has long worked as a key grip, gaffer and camera operator on commercial and indie-film productions in New York, and he has also shot and directed short films.) "I took on production duties by default," Donnelly explains. "Bryan and Ben were very young, and they had no producer." However, taking on the above-the-line job had its advantages for the man behind the camera; he notes with a laugh that serving as supervising producer "helped me get what I needed [as cinematographer] more easily!"

Meanwhile, Sipe and Carney

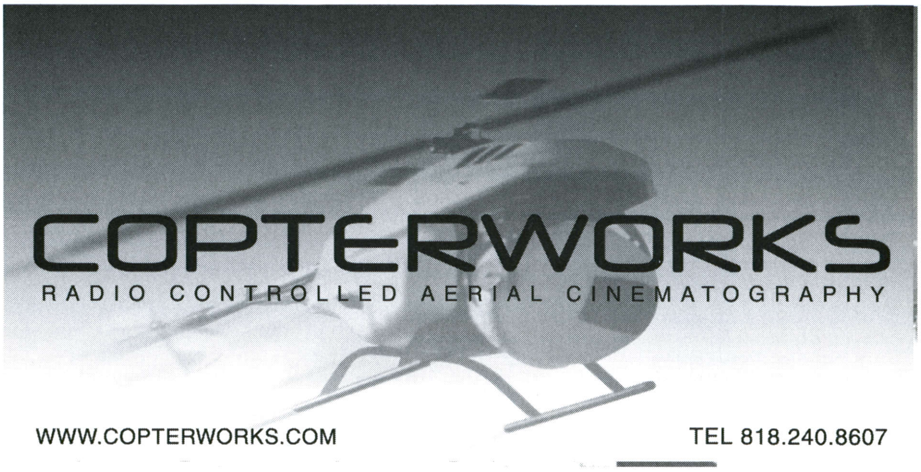
Photos courtesy of Exit 82 Productions.

found further inspiration in Smith's success with *Chasing Amy*. "When we saw the way that looked, with the simple two-shots, we thought, 'We can do this,'" Sipe explains. "We also thought the New Jersey thing might work in our favor." He and Carney traveled several exits north of Toms River to Red Bank, where they found Smith behind the counter of the comic-book shop he owns near his View Askew production offices. One of Smith's key pieces of advice was that the duo shouldn't skimp on their sound budget. As Sipe recalls, "He said, 'As long as the audience can hear the dialogue, they'll forgive you a lot.'"

Donnelly decided not to skimp on the visual end, either, and the filmmakers opted to shoot on film rather than digital video (DV). "Bryan and Ben wanted film, so we decided to go for it," he says. "I'm quite glad, [because] I wasn't interested in shooting a DV feature, and the project didn't warrant that approach. *A Million Miles* is a simple story, and it needed the more lyrical feel [of film]."

In addition to teaming with the energetic and resourceful Donnelly, the filmmakers had another stroke of good fortune when they wrote to famous Jersey native Bruce Springsteen and asked for permission to use his song *Sad Eyes* in the film. "Springsteen's manager said that Bruce had read the treatment and felt that the Jersey Shore background warranted the use of the song," Donnelly notes. They also obtained the rights to use a song by Springsteen's longtime collaborator Little Steven (a.k.a. Steven Van Zandt). The Springsteen and Van Zandt song rights are for film-festival exhibition only, but Donnelly notes that the songs are "still a great selling point to get the attention of distributors."

As supervising producer, Donnelly pulled together the crew and negotiated arrangements with suppliers. A key step was the purchase of 25,000' of Fuji Super F-500 tungsten and F-250 daylight 16mm stock. Donnelly chose Fuji based on extensive testing he had conducted on another, more prominent indie film, the Sundance hit *Girlfight* (see *AC* April 2000). Donnelly served as B-camera operator on that film and did the stock



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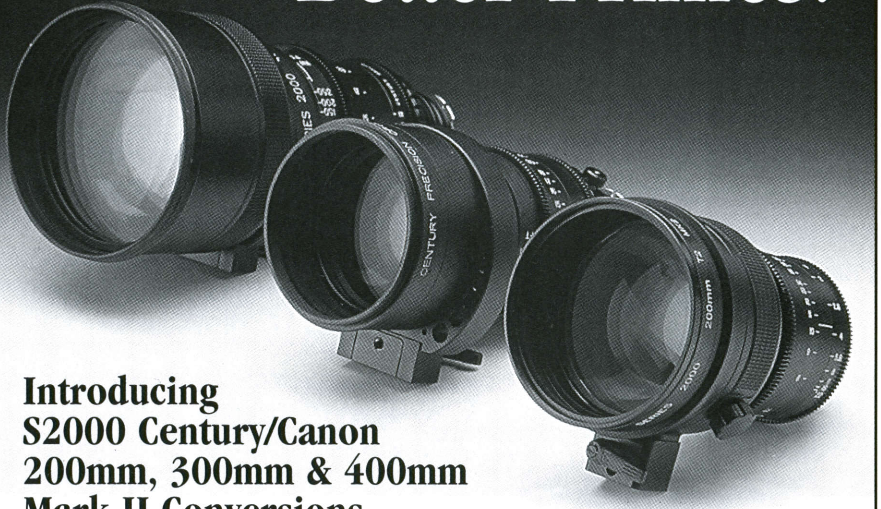

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tests under director of photography Patrick Cady's supervision.

For *A Million Miles,* the Fuji stock offered a "cooler, higher-contrast look that we liked," Donnelly explains. He also readily acknowledges the importance of Fuji's cost — about 30 percent less than comparable Kodak stock. Donnelly obtained the camera package for *A Million Miles* from William Miller, a friend who also served as 1st AC throughout the show. The entire film was shot with Miller's Arriflex SR-3 16mm camera and his Zeiss Superspeed prime lenses and Zeiss 11-110mm zoom.

Donnelly's next step was to find the right gaffer with a truck full of lights. "I hired Jason Valez, who owns a five-ton truck with a decent tungsten package," he explains. "Jason is only 24, but he's been working since he was 18 and is very skilled." Valez's tungsten lights were supplemented with two 1.2K HMIs and assorted Kino Flos (including a Wall-O-Lite) loaned to the production by Luna Lighting of New York, with whom Donnelly had forged a good relationship on his previous projects. "Luna's favor was another huge savings," he notes.

A generator was beyond the production's means most of the time, except for a few night exteriors. "Jason did [electrical] tie-ins at the various locations," says the cinematographer. "We wound up using the two HMIs and the Kino Flos most of the time for speed, mobility and the quality of the light."

One critical reason that the filmmakers were able to put the film in the can for so little money was that the only locations the writers included were ones that they knew were obtainable. As might be expected for a coming-of-age story about two young men in a beach town, much of the action takes place in bars. "We shot in some of the very same places I had frequented when I was that age," Donnelly reveals, emphasizing his familiarity with the milieu.

However, this familiarity didn't eliminate the challenges of lighting and filming the large spaces convincingly. Filming took place during the day when the bars were closed, and because extras are hard to come by on low-budget films, the filmmakers were constantly trying to "make five people look like 50," Donnelly says. This requirement led to the use of longer lenses to isolate the actors from the empty backgrounds. "We favored the 50mm Zeiss prime when we weren't using the 25mm. With the zoom, we were usually in the 85-110 range. We mostly used the Zeiss primes, however." He's quick to point out that such top-shelf glass is a luxury in the low-budget world.

The need to cheat the empty bar spaces also influenced Donnelly's lighting approach. The key lights tended to be Kino Flos hidden close to the actors. He adds, "To punch the actors out of the background, and let the background go darker to hide the fact that we didn't have extras, I used a lot of backlight set about half a stop over key."

The few night exteriors were simpler. "We used every light on the truck just to get a base stop [with the 500 ISO stock]," Donnelly laments.

To produce some atmospheric lighting on a shoestring, Donnelly used only one or two sources for several highly emotional scenes. When Ford is awakened by the ranting of his alcoholic father, his bedroom is lit with a combination of warm interior and colder exterior window light, with a window-pane pattern projected on one wall. Two lighting instruments did the job. "I had one of our two HMIs outside the bedroom window with ¼ CTB gel [to further emphasize the light's blue cast]," Donnelly explains. "We put a paper tape pattern on the window to get the shadow projections of the window panes." For the warmer interior light that was motivated from the living room, "we bounced a 2K tungsten light into a card out in the hallway."

Donnelly credits Miller for encouraging him to work with mixed color temperatures. "You're trained to match all of the light sources by color temperature, and if you don't, you feel as if you're doing something wrong," Donnelly says. "But nowadays, [the use of mixed color temperatures] is a look that people like."

In another scene, Jim becomes more deeply immersed in his struggle to

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decide whether to leave for California or stay in his stifling hometown to be with his unreliable new love, Sarah (Gina Merchan). The strain of the conflict awakens him in the middle of the night, and he dolefully places a call to Sarah, only to hear the ominous sound of her answering machine. Jim's room is lit solely by blue-green light from the bedroom window behind and to the side of the actor; his face is mostly in shadow.

The setup was simple, Donnelly explains. "It was two lights acting as one source. We had both of our HMIs close together outside the window with some 250 diffusion and ⅛ blue gels. There was no fill in the room at all; the white walls gave us some bounce." The tremendous latitude of the fast Fuji stock added the unexpected detail on the actor's face. "Initially, I did not want to see his face at all, and I was surprised by how much we [could] see," Donnelly says, adding that the scene's greenish tint, which will be corrected toward blue in the final timing, resulted from the fact that the two HMIs were not properly balanced.

Other emotionally charged scenes take place in the front yard of the home that Ford shares with his dissolute father. Ford is slowly restoring a 1956 Chevrolet as he and Jim discuss their complex friendship and ponder their futures. Several of these tense moments are heightened by skillful Steadicam moves. "My friend George Bianchini has his own Steadicam unit. I'd given him jobs doing music videos over the years, so he came down and shot four or five scenes for us," Donnelly explains, adding that the high-end camera movement adds some luster to the film. "For a low-budget film, having this wonderful camera movement was a great advantage. Static shots are the norm for this type of production because of money considerations. [Without the Steadicam,] our prolonged takes would have been broken up [and shot in a static way,] on sticks." A small track dolly was also used to add camera movement throughout the production.

Sipe and Donnelly developed extensive storyboards using Donnelly's Storyboard Quick software, but the cinematographer says that in general, the

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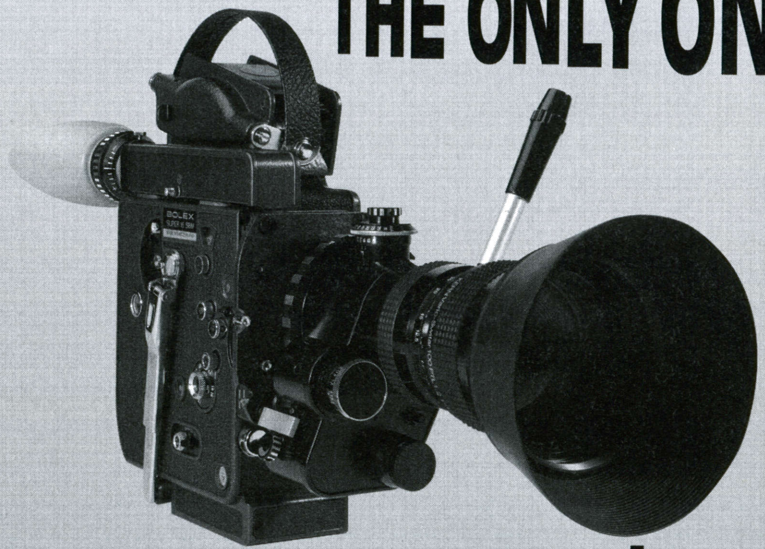

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shoot had the feel of "an NYU student production with a higher budget." He adds with a laugh, "We had a video tap on the camera with playback, but no script supervisor."

Sipe and Carney are currently working to raise money for a 35mm blowup and prints, as well as audio work, so that *A Million Miles* can hit the festival circuit in style. "At first, I didn't believe that the film would actually happen," Donnelly admits, "but Bryan had a really strong vision for a first-time director. [He and Ben] read a lot of books, and then they went to the Pat Donnelly film school!"

Cinematographer's Day in Palm Springs

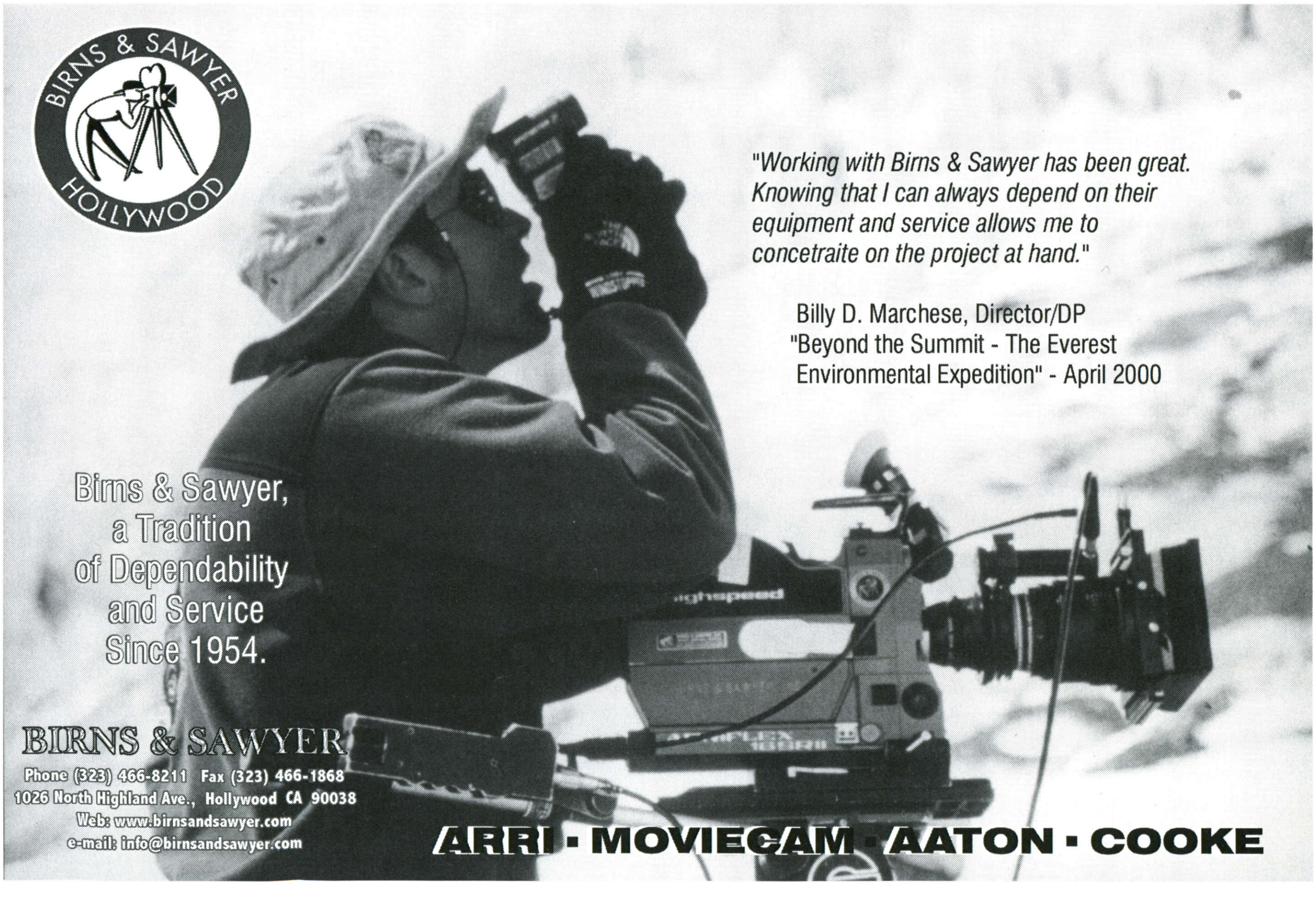
The third annual Cinematographer's Day program will commence on the opening weekend of the Nortel Networks Palm Springs International Film Festival, which will take place from January 11-24, 2001. The cinematography forum will continue a highly focused and provocative discussion that explores many topics, including the cinematic language of visual metaphors, the cinematographer as collaborator/co-author of film, and new digital technology.

The first part of the two-day program, scheduled for January 12, is dedicated to the exposition of three films in competition for the Da Vinci Award, selected by a jury of nine master directors of photography from submissions by cinematography societies throughout the world. The award, a sculpture created by Italy's Arnaldo Pomodoro, recognizes international accomplishment in cinematographic art and technology. Each film will be presented by its cinematographer, and then analyzed afterward with the public by jury members who will discuss the elements of light, shadow, and composition that each film exemplifies. The prize will be awarded at the black-tie Awards Gala on Saturday, January 13.

Oscar-nominated cinematographer Giuseppe Rotunno, ASC, AIC (*All That Jazz*) will preside over the international jury, which will also include directors of photography Jost Vacano, ASC, BVK (*Hollow Man*), Shoji Ueda (*Ran*), Pierre Lhomme (*Cyrano de Bergerac*), Harvey Harrison, BSC (*American Gothic*), Henning Kristiansen (*Hunger*), John Seale, ASC, ACS (*The Perfect Storm*), Vilmos Zsigmond, ASC (*Close Encounters of the Third Kind*) and John Alonzo, ASC (*Chinatown*).

With the exception of Seale, who is on location in England filming *Harry Potter*, all of the jurors are expected to attend the festival, participate in the various programs, and meet the public to discuss their roles as filmmakers.

Following screenings of the nominated films, Vacano will moderate a panel discussion on the legal and moral rights of cinematographers as creative co-authors of films. The balance of artistic, creative and legal acknowledgement



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of the cinematographer's role will be stressed.

The evening will conclude with a special screening of Edgar G. Ulmer's restored masterpiece *Bluebeard*, photographed by Eugen Schuftan. The director's daughter, Arianne Ulmer Cipes, who has devoted her professional life to the study and preservation of her father's films, will conduct a discussion with a noted cinematographer regarding the film's imaginative photography and extraordinary use of light. The print has been preserved from the negative at the CNC in Paris.

On the second day of the festival, January 13, the formal presentation of commentary and seminars will take place. *Variety*'s Todd McCarthy, director of the acclaimed cinematography documentary *Visions of Light* (see review in this month's DVD Playback column on page 20), will moderate The Complex Language of Film panel, which will explore the artistic and collaborative interaction between cinematographers and directors, production designers, editors, and composers. Dante Spinotti, ASC, AIC, Giuseppe Rotunno, AIC, John Schlesinger and others will offer their thoughts.

Victor J. Kemper, president of the American Society of Cinematographers, will present a short discussion on new digital technology, to be followed by an afternoon digital cinema seminar moderated by David Schneulle of Lucasfilm. John Alonzo, ASC will lead a discussion among several prominent cinematographers about their work in digital filmmaking, which will be followed by a technical discussion evaluating image acquisition, postproduction, movie distribution, digital projection, the role of service companies, studio participation and the evolution of the digital lab, as exemplified by Éclair Laboratories of Paris.

The Cinematographer's Day program is the brainchild of Luciano Tovoli, ASC, AIC, who, in collaboration with Dr. David B. Kaminsky of the festival's executive board of directors, worked to develop and implement the event in 1999. All of the program's events and films will be presented in the new Festival of Arts Theater.

Museum Treasures

Behind the Screen: Making Motion Pictures and Television, an exhibition from New York's American Museum of the Moving Image (AMMI), will be on display at the Exploratorium, 3601 Lyon St., San Francisco, from February 10-May 13, 2001.

Comprised of more than 45 historic artifacts from AMMI's collection, the exhibit explores the science and craft of moving images and their production. Admission is included in the Exploratorium admission fee. For information, call (415) 561-0363. ■

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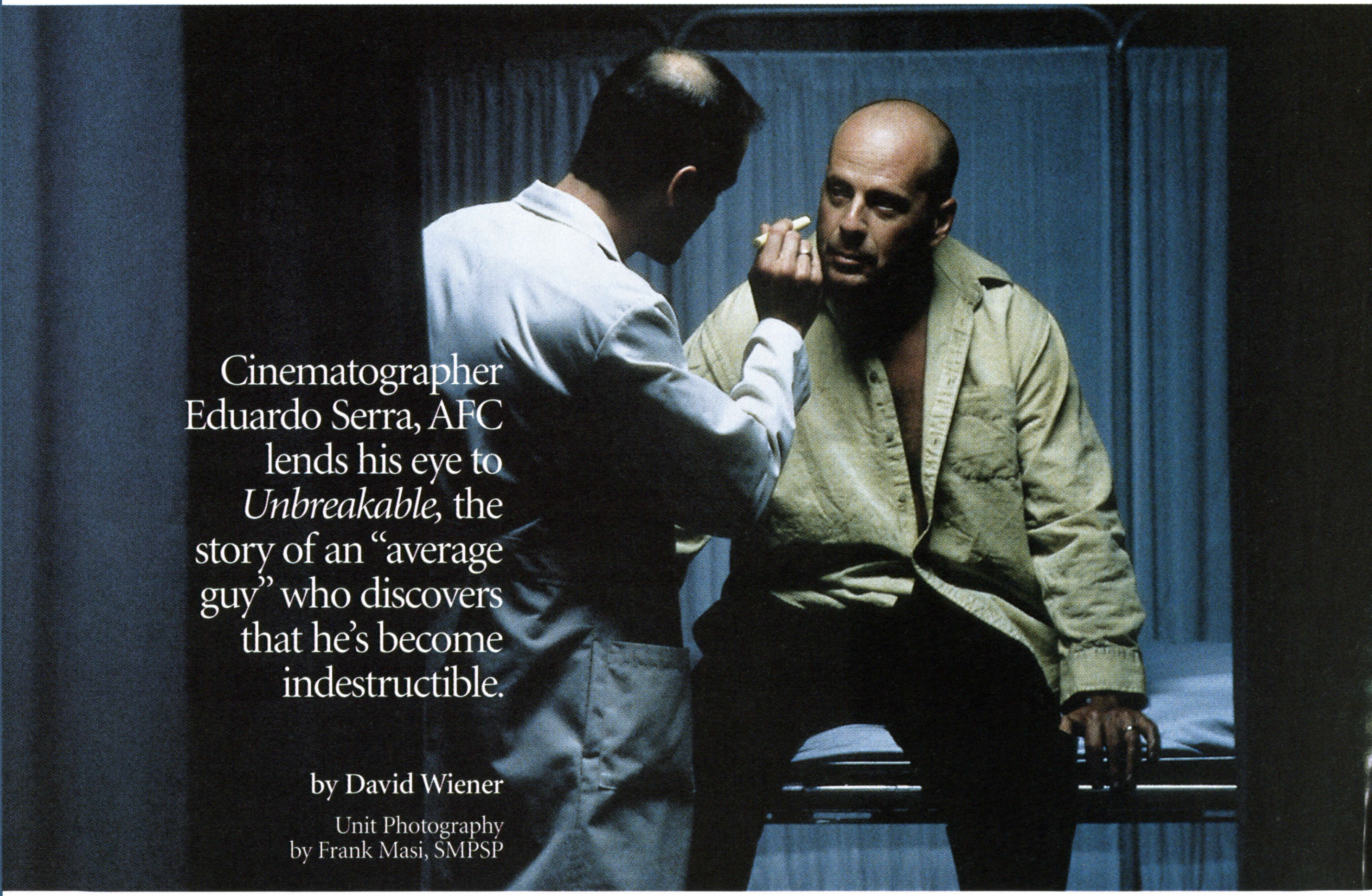


Cinematographer Eduardo Serra, AFC lends his eye to *Unbreakable*, the story of an "average guy" who discovers that he's become indestructible.

by David Wiener

Unit Photography
by Frank Masi, SMPSP

Before serving as director of photography on M. Night Shyamalan's *Unbreakable*, Eduardo Serra, AFC had never dealt with the paranormal. True, he had shot *What Dreams May Come*, "but I don't really feel as if that film was about the paranormal," the cinematographer says. "It was more a film about the afterlife." Of course, Shyamalan's breakthrough hit *The Sixth Sense* was definitely a paranormal tale, and his new project also deals with the uncanny. Serra recalls, "When Night first sent me the *Unbreakable* script, I was in Europe, and *The Sixth Sense* hadn't been released there yet, so I really didn't know anything about him. We had a very interesting conversation over the phone about *Unbreakable* and his ideas [for the picture]. The key thing he told me in that first conversation — which was very surprising — was that this was a story of a simple man and his family being confronted with some strange events. The family was not just a subplot, it was the key [to the film].

"When I did see *The Sixth*

Photos courtesy of Touchstone Pictures.

Sense, one of the things that I found so interesting was [Night's] real care for the characters; he has a real love for people, a genuine kindness. And I think that's also true of *Unbreakable;* whatever fantastic adventures happen, the film is first about people, and about the relationship between a man, a wife and a son. We always made the family scenes at home warmer in color tone than the exterior world; even if there are problems [in the home], it's a warm and good place." The cinematographer adds that the extra sense of warmth was created with just a hint of CTO on soft light sources.

Serra, whose credits also include *The Wings of the Dove* (see *AC* June '98), *Jude*, *Funny Bones*, *The Color of Lies* and *Map of the Human Heart*, says he has always been fascinated with the subtle ways in which color can affect an audience, and he worked closely with Shyamalan to design an appropriate color scheme for *Unbreakable*. "In our [initial] meetings, we determined how the color structure depended on the character," Serra says. "Each character would have a 'color arc,' quite a subtle game with changes of colors — things that are not supposed to be very obvious onscreen, but which still create a feeling [in the audience]."

The two most important "color arcs" belong to the main characters, David Dunne (Bruce Willis) and Elijah Price (Samuel L. Jackson). Bizarre and mysterious events make David practically invulnerable to injury (hence the film's title), but his friend, Elijah, is born terribly frail and becomes weaker as the story goes on. Their characters are complementary, and so are the color arcs Serra chose for them. "David goes from cold to warm light," Serra explains, "and Elijah goes from warm to cold. They are symmetrical reflections of each other, so their color arcs move in opposite directions." For the most part, Serra achieved this delicate shift with camera filters, but he sometimes used gels on the lights.

At the start of the film, there's nothing particularly unusual about David's look. But as his transformation proceeds, his lighting becomes more stylized, as Serra explains. "Sometimes, I used visual references to comic-book style. In fact, our main pictorial reference was comic books." In the story, Elijah is a huge comic-book fan, and he gains a strange sort of comfort from David's increasing power. For Elijah, it is evidence of a rational, ordered universe, in which his friend's invulnerability balances out his own physical decline. By the time the movie ends, David is lit rather harshly, almost like a superhero or "a piece of marble sculpture," Serra notes. "[His appearance is] more abstract, silhouetted; I was playing with shadows [to convey the impression of physical strength in some shots]." Serra used a single key light from the side to get this sculpted look, usually a Kino Flo or a tungsten Fresnel.

"[Unlike David,] there is no radical change in Elijah, so the [color shift] on Elijah is not as big," Serra notes. "We see Elijah three or four times before he appears as an adult: at birth, at age 6 and at age 10. I used coral filters on the camera for Elijah's childhood, [and as he gets older] he becomes more normal [in color tone and then a bit] cooler. I pull-processed Elijah's childhood scenes one stop to make them softer. Other than that, I did nothing unusual with the processing. We used two stocks, Kodak Vision 320T 5277 for family scenes and Elijah's childhood, and Vision 500T 5279 for the exterior world."

In one long, handheld shot, Elijah's mother gives birth to him at a 1950s department store. The scene was filmed at a converted convention center that hid an unexpected bonus in its ceiling: old track lights, just like the kind you'd find in any department store 40 years ago. Serra's chief lighting technician, Steve Litecky, details, "We used those track lights practically unchanged from the way they were originally installed — incandescent, tungsten practicals, 150-watt mushroom bulbs, pointing straight down at racks of clothing and merchandise. Off to one side, we had 5K Skypans diffused by 20-by-20 gridcloths; those units provided general background light for the store, and none of it spilled onto

Opposite: After a devastating train crash, a confounded doctor (Michael Kelly) informs David Dunne (Bruce Willis) that he's the sole survivor — and that there isn't as much as a scratch on his body. This page: The resilient Dunne has a chat with his cosmic counterpart: the frail, enfeebled Elijah Price (Samuel L. Jackson).

Right: Lost in thought, Dunne awaits his train's fateful departure. Below and opposite page, bottom: The crew shoots with a full-scale train mockup in a soundstage. Shyamalan initially planned to continue this sequence until the first instants after the crash, but later decided that the scene should stop an instant before the impact.

Elijah and his mother."

Elijah's mother lies on a small couch with the camera at a low angle, looking across her to the doctor who delivers her son. A white paper Chinese lantern with a 500-watt Photoflood on a dimmer provided soft lighting for these closer shots. "I often use Chinese lanterns," Serra says, "as big as possible. They are very good for one-light shots. I put them as close as possible to the edge of the frame and sometimes follow the actors around with them." The mother's face was lit by a pinpoint of light from high above — a Mole-Richardson Tweenie, Litecky says, "with Lee 250 in front for a little diffusion. That was basically it for the delivery scene."

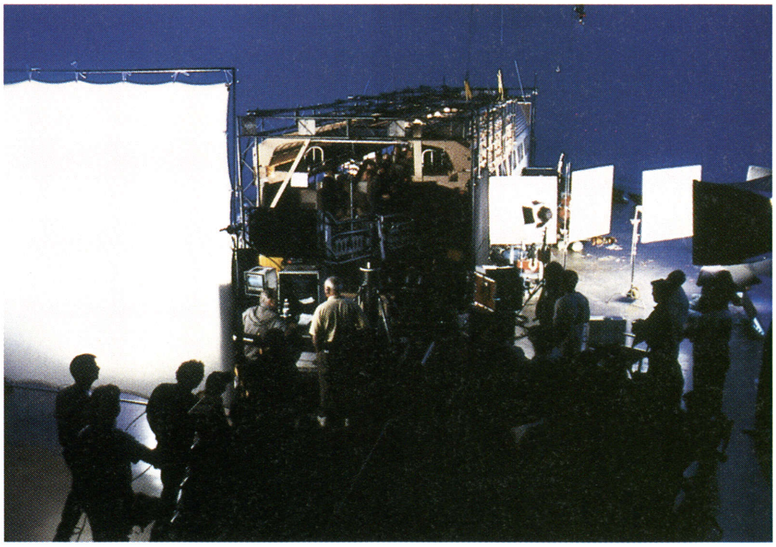
Serra prefers a soft texture and usually gets it without using lens filters. "A couple of times, I might have used a very light Tiffen [white] ProMist for some close-ups," Serra says, "but as a rule, there was no diffusion on the camera." According to Litecky, the soft light was often generated by Aurasoft lighting fixtures. "You don't see those all that often, but Eduardo specifically asked for two and used them extensively, particularly on interior sets," he notes. "They're great as very soft, one-source lights, and they take either HMI or tungsten halogen globes. The tungsten [about 2900°K] was used for interior soft light, and the HMI [around 5200°K] was used for exterior soft light and also for simulating daylight coming through windows."

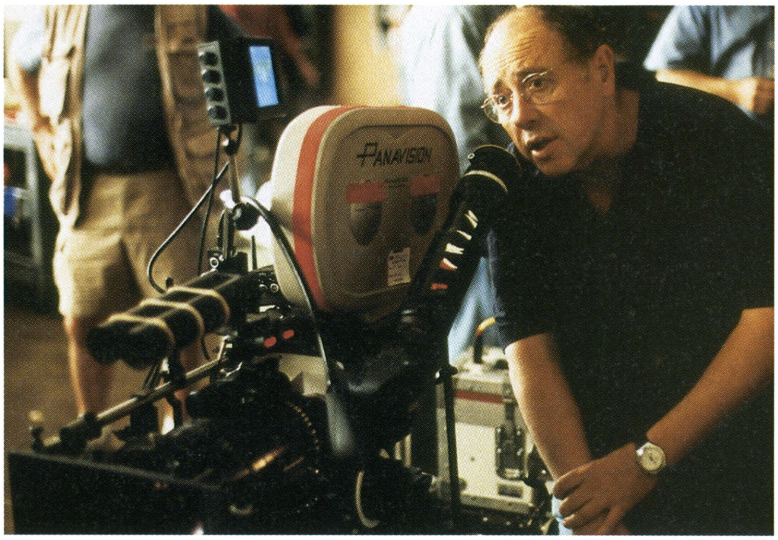
Serra describes Shyamalan as a director who is extremely concerned with emotions, particularly when it comes to motivating camera moves. "If you are supposed to do a tracking shot," Serra explains, "the cue for the move would never simply be the fact that somebody moves or follows somebody. We moved to reflect or catch a change of emotion.

"For example, there is a scene in a train car where David Dunne is joined by a girl who talks with him — it's a long shot that lasts maybe four minutes. Instead of cutting from one character to the other, the camera moves and masks one of them. *Unbreakable* was filmed in anamorphic widescreen [2.35:1], so half the screen is always blocked by one train seat and only one character is visible at a time. Then the camera moves and you see the other actor, according to the lines and emotions. While we were shooting, this all had to be precisely timed; if we missed a moment, we had to start again. It was a subtle movement, no more than two feet from side to side, with the camera mounted on a Lenny Arm [II Plus], which allowed us to use a normal focal-length lens about three feet from the actors."

Although the passenger-car set was lit by 65-watt fluorescent overheads running the length of the train, most of the lighting came through the windows. "We used low-angle 10Ks through diffusion as key sources aimed through the windows," Litecky says. Blondes diffused through 216 frames were at times substituted for the 10Ks and were electronically flickered to produce the effect of passing trains.

Like the department-store set, the backyard of the Dunne home was another practical location, built





According to Shyamalan, director of photography Eduardo Serra brought a truly artistic sensibility to the project. "When I was gearing up on *Unbreakable*, I met a lot of cinematographers who could get a natural look, but not all of them could find the style that exists within the natural world," the director says. "Eduardo has a wonderful, effortless style, and he can create images that are both eerie and beautiful."

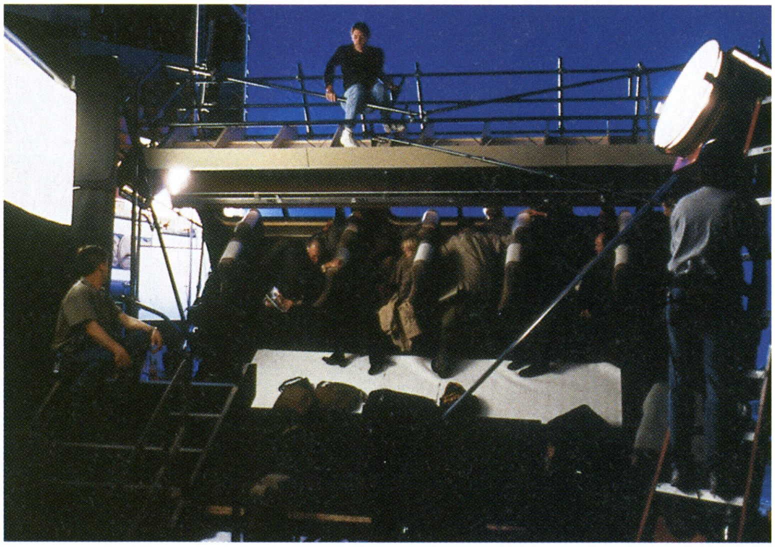
from scratch at a city park. The yard featured a porch, rear façade, and an in-ground, tarp-covered pool. In one scene, David is thrown into this pool and nearly drowns; Serra originally wanted to light the sequence with a single practical, an exterior backyard light perched under the eaves of the roof. Litecky recalls, “We had a hard architectural light shining down on the pool, but it wasn’t quite right, so we ended up using a Blonde as the source. The fill light was a Tweenie at ground level, diffused through a 4-by-4 216 frame. For some shots where David gets tangled up in the pool cover, an underwater camera was used. It was handheld, and the shot is from beneath him, looking up. You can see the practical on the back of the house, but we supplemented it to bring out the bubbles and movement. We took a couple of Pars and bashed them down at the pool — not to light his face, but just to see the desperate, swirling movement as he tries to escape.”

Serra adds, “That was a very important scene, and we played with just that light [as a source]; it’s very harsh, and it’s interesting what you can see and not see from being just under the water level.

“Another very interesting location was a bank that we transformed into a train station [see lighting diagram on page 44],” the cinematographer continues. “It was a wonderful old building with very high ceilings. Night wanted a nighttime shot that would reveal [the interior] from ceiling to floor, which was quite difficult to light. However, there were holes in the ornamented, cement ceiling [which the bank had used for sodium-vapor lights pointed down at the marble floor], so we replaced the [sodium-vapor lights] with 1.2K tungsten Molepars, which provided much of the light for that scene.”

The Molepars were also pointed straight down and bounced off the white floor, providing soft, generalized fill. Additional smaller lights were bounced into the floor for tighter shots as needed. “We put 10Ks on the upper level,” Litecky adds, “skimming the edges of the pillars. We used two-tube Kino Flos to backlight a Plexiglas wall and two four-tube Kino Flos to light an area near some stairs. A back hallway was lit with 2900°K Kino Flo tubes placed in existing fixtures. In one area that wasn’t lit by the bounced Pars, we used two [4K tungsten] Aurasofts on low stands pointed up at the ceiling to mimic Par light bouncing off the marble floor.”

Serra says this type of lighting was “exactly what Night needed to produce the cathedral-like impression he was after. Also, quite unusually for me, I put in a little smoke, just a little atmosphere, so you feel those lights. That was it — we used very little fill except [on] close-ups, and that would just be a Redhead or Blonde [bounced into 4-by-8 beadboard or off the floor. Bounced 2Ks also were used to light frosted Plexiglas windows along a false wall.]” If one of the ceiling Par beams happened to interfere with a close-up, that particular unit was simply turned off. An old-fashioned clock at one end of the station was lit from the inside by dimmer-controlled 100-watt household bulbs.



Above: The crew creates artificial rain for a moody nighttime sequence set on an outdoor stairway. **Right:** A crane equipped with a remote head captures a shot of security guard Dunne arriving for work at a football stadium.

"The general mood of the train station is very contrasty because it shows a dramatic moment when David makes important decisions," Serra notes. "It became one of my favorite [scenes] in the film."

A train crash leads to a significant scene at a hospital, where accident victims are being treated. This was a real emergency room in a real hospital that had recently been shut down. One of the first shots shows a bleeding victim in the foreground and David sitting on a gurney talking to a doctor in the background. "That was very simply lit," Serra explains. "We just used fluorescents above them for the foreground and the background; there were no reflectors or muslins." The existing emergency room drop-ceiling lighting consisted of four-tube fluorescent fixtures. The crew replaced the standard tubes with color-corrected Chroma 50s, and one of these corrected four-tube fixtures provided Willis's key light. The body in the foreground was lit by a four-tube daylight Kino Flo, deployed as a high backlight pointing toward the camera.

The next scene incorporates a 360-degree Steadicam shot as David exits a hospital elevator into a hallway, where he's met by a flock of reporters. The fluorescent tubes in the elevator were replaced with Chroma 50s, but the crew discovered that the tubes in the hallway ceiling fixtures were nonstandard, and that the available color-corrected tubes wouldn't fit. Instead of replacing the tubes, the crew simply gelled them with Full Minus Green.

Detailing his camera and lens package, Serra offers, "Our lenses on the show were anamorphic Primos and an anamorphic zoom; [we used the zoom] very subtly during other moves on an arm or [while] tracking [instead of for zooms]. We had a Panavision Millennium, a Panaflex G2, and a Panavision Millennium XL, a smaller and very interesting camera that we generally used for crane shots, handheld shots and Steadicam shots. Night was very aware of when to use the Steadicam and when to go handheld; those techniques present two different emotions, so he was very careful [with them].

"For instance, there was an important Steadicam sequence, a difficult shot near the end of the film in which David carries his wife up some stairs. The Steadicam moves around them in an incredible ballet, which is intended to create an almost magical feel, as if David's wife is floating. The actress [Robin Wright-Penn] was supported by wires, and the Steadicam operator circled them several times." Although the scene was filmed on a set, the complicated

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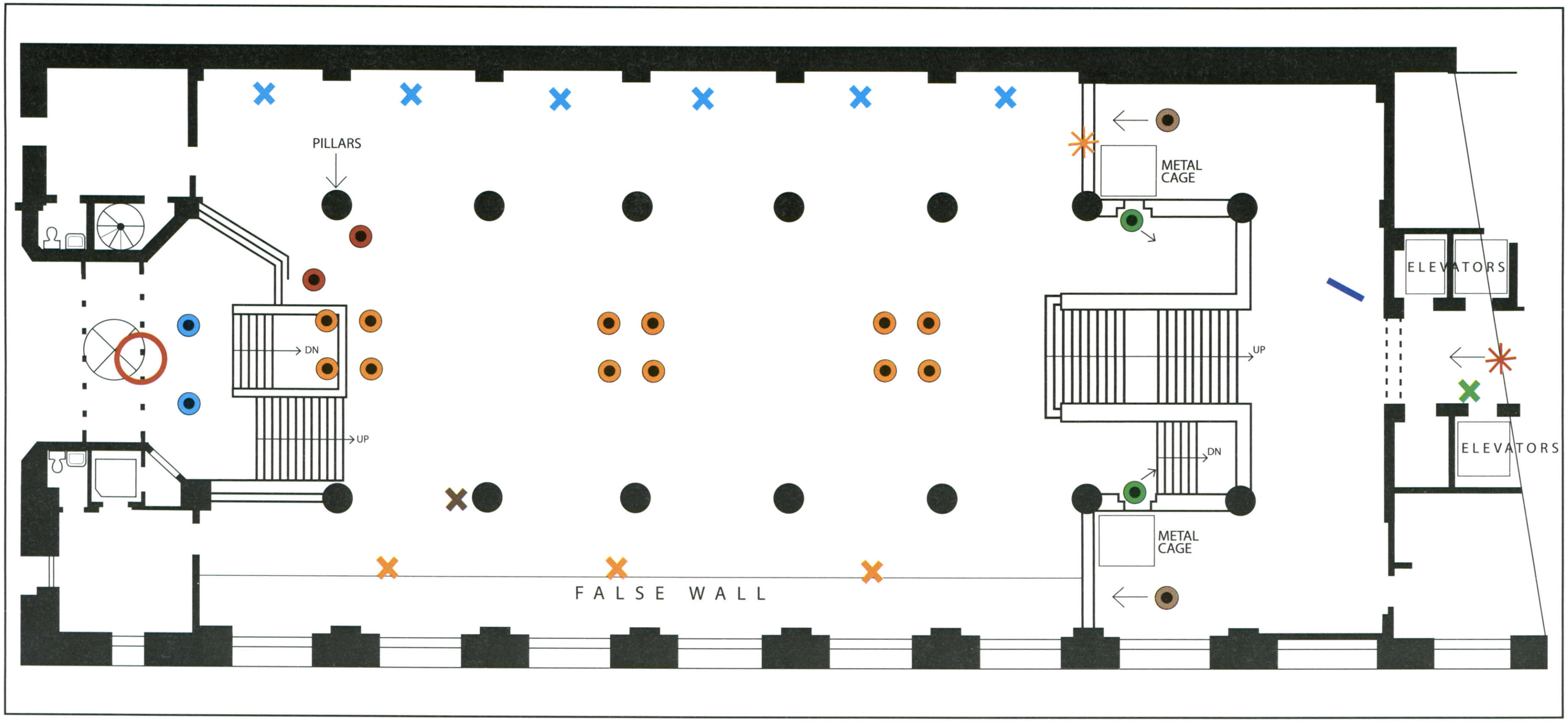


UNBREAKABLE

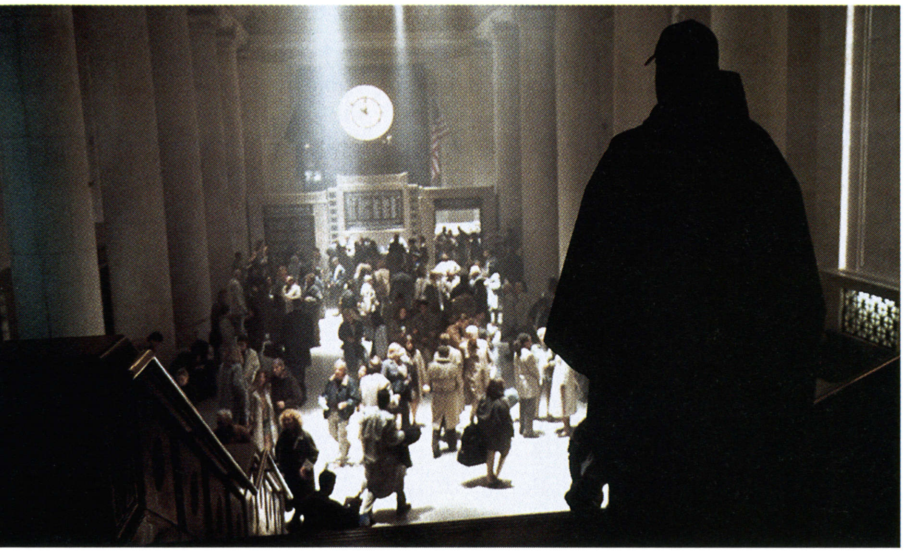
PLAN: INT. TRAIN STATION
(FORMER BANK BUILDING)

SCALE: 1/16" = 1'

KEY

●	1.2K Tungsten Pars lighting from holes in ceiling bounced into station floor 36' below.	✕	4' x 2 Bulb 2900° Kino Flo Fixtures backlighting frosted plexi 4' x 6' wall plugs.	╱	2K Open Face Bounce on 4' x 4' beadboard from floor on upper level.
●	4' x 4 Bulb 2900° Kino Flo Fixtures lighting magazine rack and food cart.	✕	2K Bounce on floor to light archway on upper level.	✳	1K Fresnel downlighting from upper level to lower level above door to back hallway. Hallway lit w/2900° Kino Bulbs in existing fixtures.
●	10Ks on stands on upper level lighting pillars and wall.	✕	2K Open Face Lights bounced into 4' x 8' beadboard behind 3 large frosted plexi windows.	○	Large Milk Glass Faced Clock backlit w/100-watt household bulbs on dimmer system.
●	2K Fresnels on stands bouncing into floor from elevator doorways.	✕	1K Open Face w/Chimera downlighting shoeshine stand.	✳	Source 4 Leko lighting small clock above archway.
●	4K Tungsten Aurasoft Lights from floor uplighting ceiling (low stands).				

4' x 8' beadboard bounces w/open face 2Ks or 1Ks moved around on main floor for various tighter shots - sometimes lights were bounced into floor.



The production went to great lengths to transform a bank into a train station (see lighting diagram on facing page). Serra recalls, "It was a wonderful old building with very high ceilings. Night wanted a nighttime shot that would reveal [the interior] from ceiling to floor, which was quite difficult to light. However, there were holes in the ornamented, cement ceiling [which the bank had used for sodium-vapor lights pointed down at the marble floor], so we replaced the [sodium-vapor lights] with 1.2K tungsten Molepars, which provided much of the light for that scene."

move made it next to impossible to hide lights. "We couldn't follow the camera, and we had to watch the wireless video-assist, which isn't as good as the cable-connected image. It was difficult to judge the lighting, and it was kind of a blind shot, but it turned out very well."

As David carries his wife, they are lit by a Redhead positioned at the top of the stairs and bounced off a 4-by-4 beadboard. When they reach the second-floor hall, the lighting comes from a single Kino Flo pointed down through the false muslin ceiling. "We tried to follow the actors upstairs with a Chinese lantern," Litecky remembers, "but we eventually decided not to do that. So when you watch the scene, you'll see almost no additional fill light. It's very dramatic."

Serra says he prefers to use the fewest sources possible. "I don't like to have lights all around in every direction," he says. "There were times when we managed to do interesting things with basically one light. There's one scene where David is looking through a closet, and we [lit] him with just the single household bulb that appears in the shot. He's looking through newspapers, and they bounce the light onto him. I like taking advantage of things like that."

David experiences visions at certain moments throughout the film, and for one of those scenes, Serra considered lighting the actor from above. "For me, toplight [suggests] film noir, but for Night it has a completely different ambience, like low-budget TV," Serra says. "Instead, to create a sense of drama, we used sidelight — a soft light fitted with an egg crate to make it a bit directional."

One shot turned out to be considerably more difficult than anyone imagined: a scene from Elijah's childhood filmed entirely as a reflection in a blank TV screen. Serra says, "That was a nightmare, even after the art department made the screen as reflective as possible — it's still a TV screen and not a mirror. We lost four or five stops between the real people and their reflections, and we had to pour incredible amounts of light onto those poor actors. In

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Outlined in a doorway, Dunne contemplates the implications of his invulnerability. Over the course of the film, Serra's lighting scheme for the character becomes more and more stylized, until he is eventually lit rather harshly, almost like a superhero "or a piece of marble sculpture," according to the cinematographer.

addition, the light had to be bounced [to maintain a soft feel]. We ended up at T11 or T16 on the real actors and T2.8 or T4 for their reflections in the screen. The worst problem of all was keeping the lights out of the shot. It was a very long, hot shot."

Litecky details, "There were windows on both sides of the TV. We covered the window on the left with 216 and aimed two 6K Pars with medium lenses straight through it to light the front of Elijah's face. On the right, we bounced three 2.5K HMI Pars into beadboard. That gave us just enough light to see the reflections of the actors in the screen. Later, the camera pulls back and we see the people themselves, so a lot of flags had to be used to make sure their backs weren't as hot as their fronts. That was one *long* take."

Another interesting one-shot scene is a handheld sequence that shows the aftermath of a car crash. The shot begins with David picking himself up off the wet street, and the camera tilts up to his face and follows him as he runs towards the wreck. Realizing that his wife is trapped inside the burning car, he wrenches the door open, unfastens her seat belt, takes her in his arms and carries her across the street as the camera is walked backward in front of them. As he sets her down on the road, the camera is lowered with her.

A Chinese lantern on a fishing pole (comprising a 250-watt Photoflood with dimmer controls on the handle of the pole) followed

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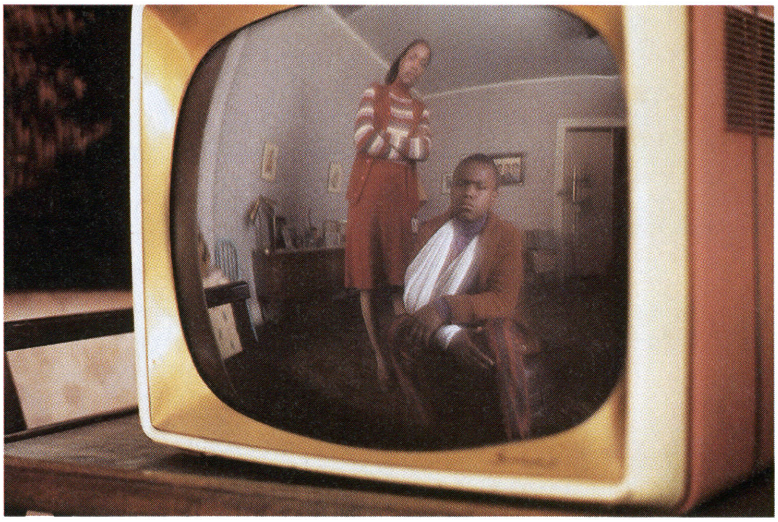
David as he went to the car and worked to free his wife; her face was lit by two full CTO-gelled Tweenies on a flicker generator. The level of the Chinese lantern was varied slightly during this shot, depending on the distance to the subject. "The most important light for that scene was provided by firebars," says Serra, who lit the entire carnival scene in *The Wings of the Dove* with little more than firebars and torches. "It was shot quite realistically, with no street-lights. There were lights in the background that just barely showed the woods near the road so it wouldn't look like a stage shot." This background illumination was provided by 10 1K Molepars, evenly divided between two Condor lifts.

"I must say that working with Night was a fascinating and wonderful experience," Serra concludes. "He doesn't work in the traditional, classic American way of shooting a master shot and then doing plenty of closer shots just in case. He doesn't really do coverage; he has very long, composed shots, and everything is carefully storyboarded. Although we certainly changed [some] things, most of the time we followed the storyboard. His approach combines the best of both worlds: America and Europe. Night has the style and freedom of imagination that European directors are allowed, but at the same time he's not self-indulgent and is always focused on the audience, which European directors often tend to forget about." ■



This seemingly basic shot, a flashback to Elijah's childhood, proved to be extremely tricky. Serra recalls, "That was a nightmare, even after the art department made the screen as reflective as possible — it's still a TV screen and not a mirror. We lost four or five stops between the real people and their reflections, and we had to pour incredible amounts of light onto those poor actors."

1985 - ... in the beginning

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Extrasensory Perception

With *Unbreakable,* director M. Night Shyamalan sets out to prove that he has persistence of vision.

Interview by Stephen Pizzello

Unit Photography by Frank Masi, SMPSP

Last year, when *The Sixth Sense* came out of nowhere to become the biggest box-office thriller of all time, grossing $650 million worldwide, director M. Night Shyamalan was thrust headlong into the industry spotlight. Like many previous filmmakers who had been anointed "young geniuses," the 29-year-old Shyamalan suddenly found himself shouldering the weight of great expectations.

Fortunately, Shyamalan, now at the ripe old age of 30, was well-prepared for cinematic success. Born in India and raised in the affluent Philadelphia suburb of Conshohocken, he made his first short film at age 12 using his father's 8mm camera. He wrote his first script at 15, and later attended film school at New York University. Intelligent, savvy and remarkably well-versed in both film theory and practice, Shyamalan exudes ambition and boundless confidence; he even had the chutzpah to tell *Esquire* magazine that he thinks he's discovered the secret to making blockbuster movies. His theory, he told interviewer Michael D'Antonio, "explains why one film that seems great doesn't connect with the audience, but one that doesn't seem great can. Critics might not like it, but the audience does. Some writers or directors do it once, but by accident. The one guy who really knows it, as far as I can tell, is Spielberg, and he may be the only one."

Pressed to reveal this magic formula, Shyamalan demurred, noting that his undisclosed theory would be put to the test with *Unbreakable,* which does bear certain similarities to *The Sixth Sense:* it's a paranormal tale centering around a troubled family, it stars Bruce Willis,

Photos courtesy of Touchstone Pictures.

and it was scripted by the director himself. On this picture, however, Shyamalan worked with a different director of photography, Eduardo Serra, AFC, who was able to infuse the film with a new and distinctive visual style.

Although the narrative twists of *Unbreakable* were being kept under tight wraps, Shyamalan was gracious enough to offer *AC* some intriguing details about the film during a friendly and freewheeling phone call from his base of operations in Philadelphia.

***American Cinematographer:* What inspires you to dream up stories with paranormal themes?**

M. Night Shyamalan: I don't have that as an agenda, but when I sit down to write a story, it just often has that sort of bent; if it doesn't, it feels more two-dimensional than I'd like the movie to be. Somehow, when I add that supernatural angle, a story becomes whole to me.

Where did you get the idea for *Unbreakable*?

Shyamalan: It came from a couple of different sources. I was actually working on an idea for another movie, which involved the sole survivor of a plane crash in which everybody else dies and he emerges unharmed. Eventually, the character has this realization about who he is. I told my wife about the story, and she said, 'Wow, you really need to do that.' It was just a beautiful, simple, powerful idea that I knew I could write a two-hour movie about.

Even though *Unbreakable* has a fantastic premise, the story never strays far from the family dynamic at its core. The same could be said about *The Sixth Sense,* so I'm assuming that the idea of family is close to your heart.

Shyamalan: You're right; on both movies, I've basically taken a humanistic approach to supernatural subject matter. I find that approach to be the most compelling entree into supernatural material, and it's also the point of view that gets me the most personally invested in that type of story. If you come up with an idea that involves, say, fairies or some other fantastic subject, it can be hard to relate to. I try to find a way to bring those kinds of fictional subjects, which are beyond the norm, to viewers in real ways that they can relate to. I want to make the audience feel fear, wonder and excitement, and I think it's easier to do that if you use marriages, children and the family dynamic as your jumping-off point.

My main goal when I'm writing is to create a movie that has both a strong plot and a strong central character — someone like, say, Cool Hand Luke. You can build a whole movie around a strong character, but it works even better if the story is supported by a plot that's equally strong.

Do you plan to continue writing your own scripts exclusively? Does that way of working make things easier for you as a director?

Shyamalan: Yes and yes; I don't know, maybe I'm not a good enough director to do someone else's script! It takes me a long time to hack out my ideas, and then figure out what's wonderful and not so wonderful about [them]. I also think a lot about the tones I want to bring out of the subject matter, the dialogue and the characters. I spend months on all of those considerations, and once I sell the screenplay I begin storyboarding and prepping like crazy. Only after all of that stuff is done do I feel confident that I can go to the set and deliver a movie. The last two times out, on *The Sixth Sense* and *Unbreakable,* I've felt that all of my massive preparation gave me a real advantage in the battle to accurately bring those visions to the screen.

Opposite page: Just 30 years old, Shyamalan already has the eye of a seasoned pro. This page: The director discusses a pivotal scene with actors Michael Kelly and Bruce Willis.

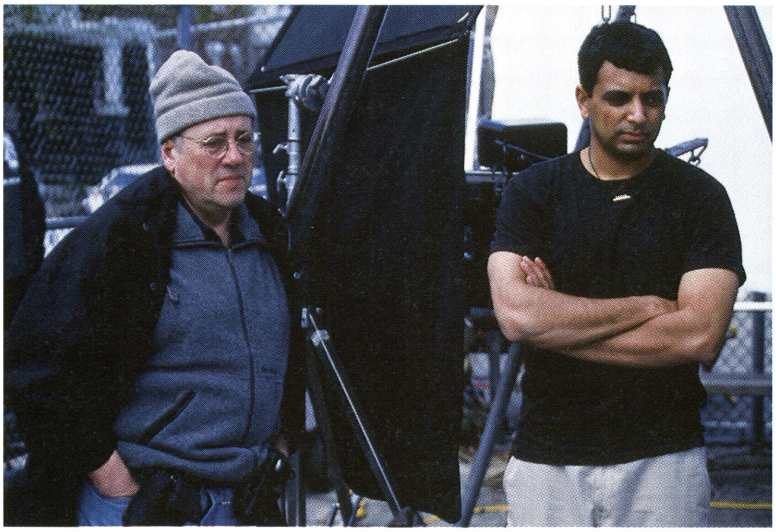
Did the tremendous success of *The Sixth Sense* have any bearing on your approach to *Unbreakable*?

Shyamalan: Definitely — just as the failure of my first feature film, *Wide Awake* [1998], had an effect upon *The Sixth Sense* in terms of my directing and the lessons I'd learned. On *The Sixth Sense,* I learned a lot about what worked in the movie, what didn't work, and why the film had such a resonant effect on people. I developed theories about those factors, and I tried to bring some of those elements to *Unbreakable,* while still attempting to move forward and try new things.

Right: An intensely focused Shyamalan listens as actors Charlayne Woodard and Johnny Hiram Jamison run through a scene. According to Serra (below left, with Shyamalan), one of the elements of *The Sixth Sense* that impressed him was the director's "real care for the characters; he has a real love for people, a genuine kindness. And I think that's also true of *Unbreakable*; whatever fantastic adventures happen, the film is first about people."

What led you to choose Eduardo Serra to be your director of photography on *Unbreakable*? Did you feel that he could help you create a new or different visual style for this picture?

Shyamalan: Well, I wanted the movie to have a European look, and I was trying to find a cinematographer who could make things look dark — but not the kind of darkness you'd see in a low-budget movie. I didn't want the film to be heavily lit, and Eduardo uses a lot of natural light. He can also make things look very natural even when they *are* lit. I basically needed someone who was comfortable with the concept of low-light photography. A lot of the cinematography I see today has a slick, non-realistic look that conflicts with my goals. I want people to feel that the hallway onscreen is *their* hallway, or that the kitchen is *their* kitchen. Their house probably isn't going to have blue lights in front of revolving fans, you know? That's just an effect. I want the audience to feel totally connected with the story, so I need a cinematographer who can create naturalistic images that have style. When I was gearing up on *Unbreakable,* I met a lot of cinematographers who could get a natural look, but not all of them could find the style that exists within the natural world. Eduardo has a wonderful, effortless style, and he can create images that are both eerie and beautiful. His images do involve meticulous work, of course, but they *look* effortless.



What did the two of you discuss in prep, and what kind of dynamic did you have on the set?

Shyamalan: Well, he and I hit it off the first time we spoke on the phone. We got along great, and the collaboration was just awesome. Eduardo's training, theories and thought patterns come from paintings, and that's a great way for us to connect — he can show me a painting and say, 'See how the light hits their faces? This is the effect I want to go for, and this is what I think it means emotionally.'

On any movie, I have very strong ideas about how I want the scenes to feel visually, so I came up with the shots and then Eduardo fine-tuned them and lit them. At the prep stage, I showed him the first set of storyboards, and we walked through every shot and every part of the movie. He then came up with a color palette and a lighting arc that would gradually change the mood of the story. He brings artistry to an aspect of picture-making that could be mechanical.

Did you have any specific visual influences in terms of the film's look? Comic books factor into the storyline, so I'm wondering if you drew any inspiration from the graphic style of comics.

Shyamalan: Yes, but in a very subtle way that remained within the parameters of naturalism. For example, Eduardo's lighting slowly becomes darker and more dramatic over the course of the movie. By the last 30 minutes, the shadows are so extreme that you feel as if you're watching *The Silence of the Lambs* or something!

Actually, I suppose that one of my primary influences for this picture was one of Eduardo's previous pictures, *The Wings of the Dove* [see *AC* June '98]. That film's

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The crew dollies toward Willis on location in Philadelphia. Shyamalan confirms that all of his camera moves are emotionally motivated: "A dolly straight on is different from a dolly on an angle. I have my own beliefs about what [various] moves mean, and while working with Eduardo I would go through them and say, 'These are the emotions that I want to convey, so what's the best way to get them?'"

imagery had the combination of richness and gentleness that I wanted for *Unbreakable.* It felt very real and beautiful without being 'artsy-fartsy.' I liked the idea of incorporating that type of artistry into the kind of big-budget, supernatural movie that I do. A lot of Hollywood movies rely on that slick look to get a response from the audience, but I feel you should have to earn it.

You've mentioned the use of color and lighting arcs over the course of the movie. What are the other main elements of the film's visual style?

Shyamalan: I wanted the scenes to have a monochromatic backdrop, so that the movie would have an almost black-and-white feel and specific elements would pop out of the frame. That was a very meticulous strategy that affected the entire crew. A character couldn't just walk through the frame; he or she had to be dressed appropriately, the background had to be just right, and every car that moved through the frame had to be very specific.

Eduardo also said that you like your camera moves to be motivated by emotion.

Shyamalan: When you're watching a movie, the camera is *you,* so it's important for a filmmaker to really understand what a pan or a tilt means. A pan is not just moving from right to left; it has a certain emotional value, just as a tilt or a zoom does. A dolly straight on is different from a dolly on an angle. I have my own beliefs about what [various] moves mean, and while working with Eduardo I would go through them and say, 'These are the emotions that I want to convey, so what's the best way to get them?'

Can you give me a specific example from *Unbreakable*?

Shyamalan: Okay, let's talk about a dolly move in the movie. There's a moment when Bruce's character has to make a decision. He has all of the information he needs, and as he makes his decision, we dolly straight on, from a low angle, right up to him. If it were a different moment for the character — if, say, he didn't understand what was going on, and then suddenly got it — we'd have come at him from an angle, and we wouldn't have been in front of him until his big realization. The character would still be doing the same thing in each of these examples — standing still and looking upwards — but the two different camera moves I've described would convey two different ideas.

What emotion do you attach to the Steadicam or to handheld camerawork?

Shyamalan: I'm still devising my opinion about what emotion a Steadicam move represents, and I'm not yet comfortable with my own analysis. The Steadicam has that floating feel, and I want to make sure I understand it more fully before I use it extensively.

On the other hand, I have a

Denny Clairmont on why he ordered forty sets of Cookes:

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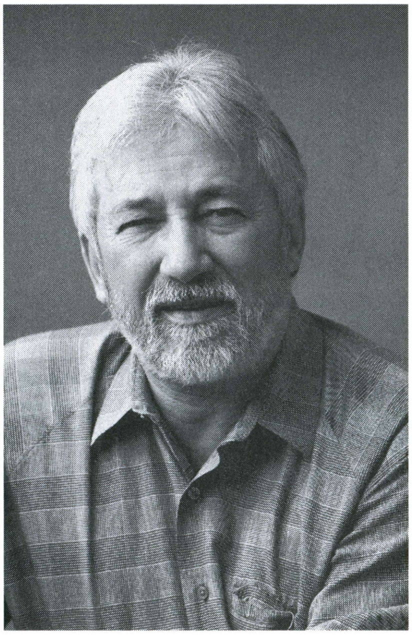

Denny Clairmont

"The best lenses I have ever seen"

"It was at the first of those meetings that I wondered aloud whether the focussing might be done with a cam, to get wider spacing and more even spacing. For twenty years, I had been looking at the non-linear cams (for changing focal *length*) inside the zooms we serviced."

"Of course, it's one thing to suggest trying cams. It's another thing to design and build a cam system that works — and works smoothly. *But they did it.*"

"At one of those early meetings, I ran some test footage that we had shot (with older lenses) on Hollywood Boulevard at night — brightly lit store windows and streetlamps, car headlights, to emphasize what cameramen *didn't* want: flare and ghosts. We asked their optical designers to concentrate on those."

"And that's what they did — brilliantly. Looking at early prototypes, I knew those lenses were going to be extraordinary," says Mr Clairmont, "But they're more than that — *they're the best lenses I've ever seen.* They've helped us get shows we wouldn't have got without them, including several that would have gone to Panavision. I've received about twenty-five sets so far. I can't wait to get all forty."

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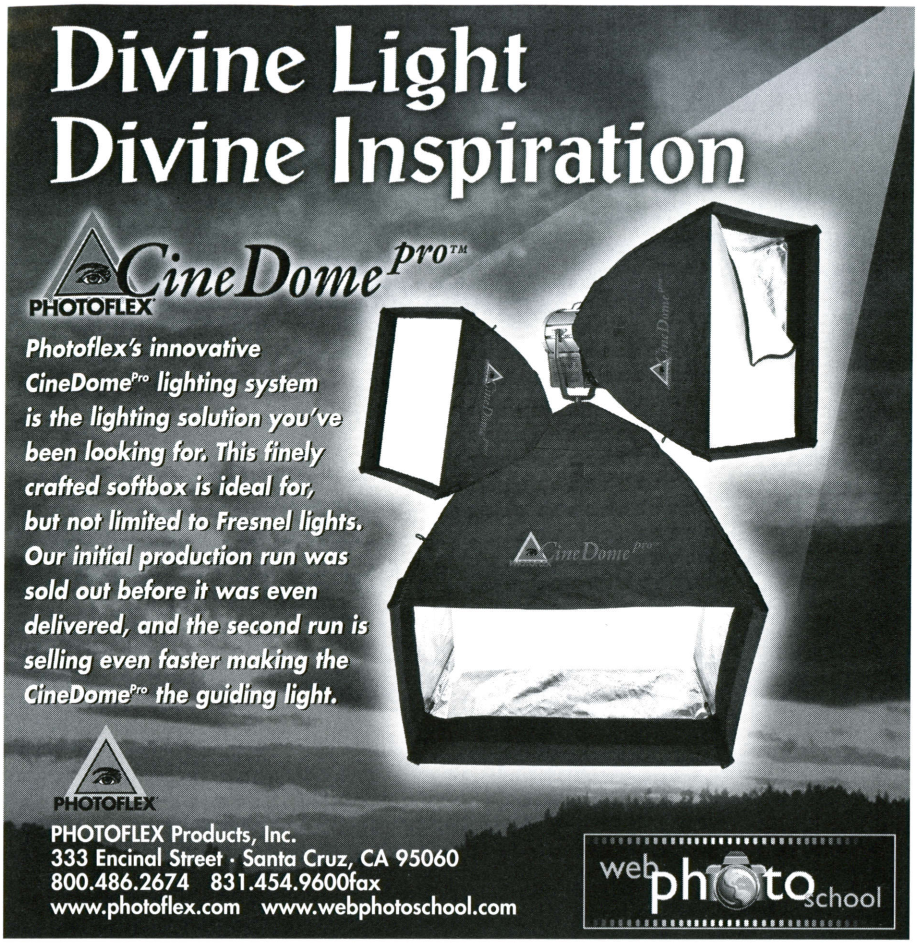
England. Voice: 44-116-264-0700. Fax: 44-116-264-0707 • Canada, South America, U.S.A. Voice: 973-335-4460. Fax: 973-335-4560 www.cookeoptics.com very clear grasp of what a handheld move brings to a scene and what it means emotionally. There are all types of handheld shots, but I always try to get *good* handheld shots — the idea is to try to make it as steady as possible, because it's not going to be steady no matter what you do! If you try as best you can to make handheld footage steady, it creates the idea that there's no brace involved and that something could go wrong. It conveys to viewers, but not in too obvious a way, that I'm not going to let them feel comfortable, that I'm going to keep them uneasy during the scene. If someone's yelling at someone in a kitchen and the camera is handheld, you get the feeling that something very bad could happen, and that you shouldn't feel secure.

How do you feel about filmmakers who use wild camera movement for its own sake?

Shyamalan: Frankly, I think a lot of those filmmakers have no clue when it comes to camera movement. Even when they try stuff, they're just guessing or borrowing — they'll say something like, 'Okay, let's try that move from Marty Scorsese's last movie, that was really cool.' Obviously, some of my ideas about camera movement *do* come from other movies I've seen, but I've always tried to tailor the camera moves I use to the particular story I'm telling.

I assume that your philosophies about the emotions of camera movement also extend to non-moving compositions as well.

Shyamalan: Definitely. In fact, on *Unbreakable* I said to Eduardo and the crew, 'There are no medium shots in this movie, because that would mean that the character is feeling medium. And if he's feeling medium, I don't need to tell anyone about it, because that's boring. If the character is feeling medium, that's the moment when we'll cut away to the next scene, because I want him to feel high and low instead.'



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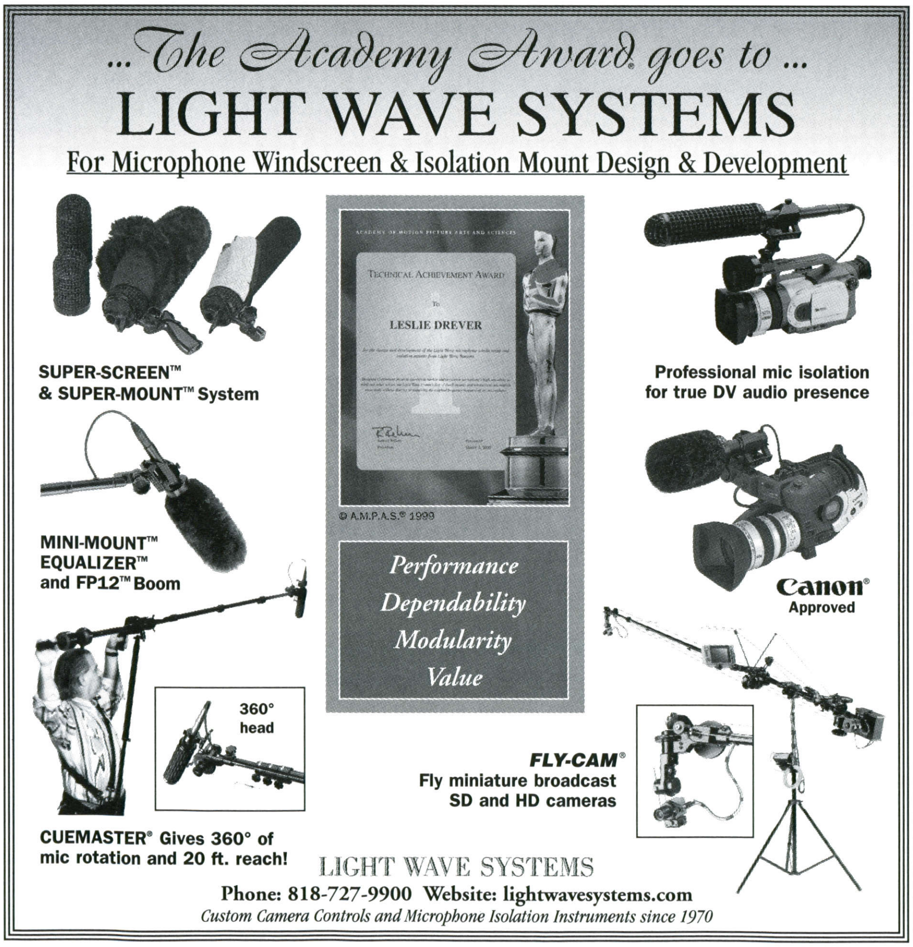

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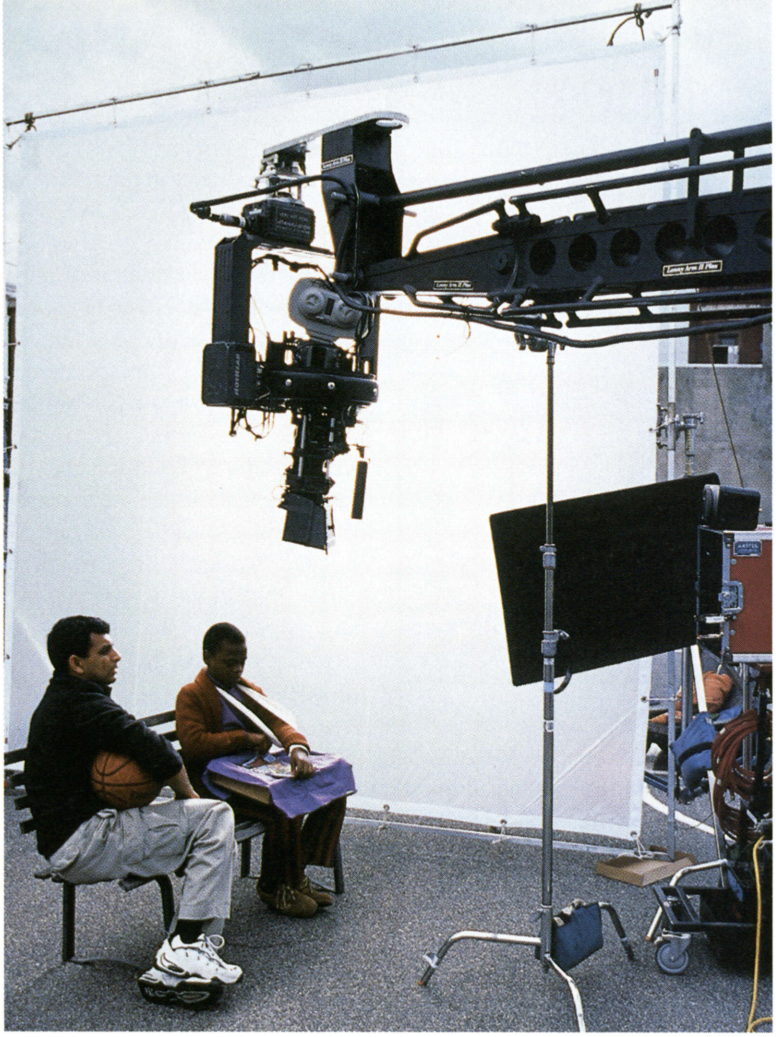


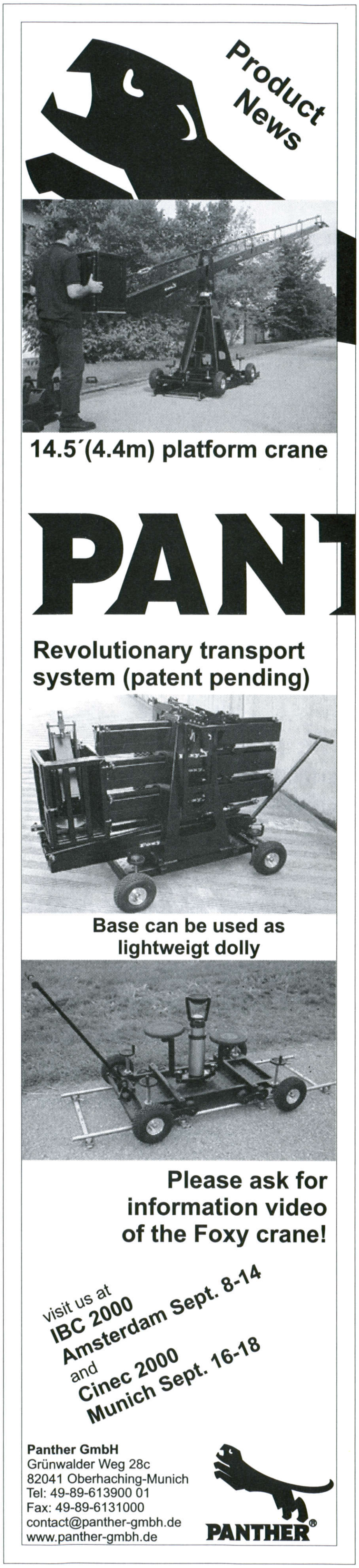
Shyamalan shares a quiet moment with Johnny Hiram Jamison before rolling the camera. Although he admits that he doesn't allow his performers to improvise scenes, he believes that "actors like it when a director says, 'This is what we're going for, and this is how I'm going to do it. Everything else is up to you. There are a thousand choices to be made in the next three minutes as I roll the camera, so go for it. You don't have to worry about all of the other stuff, because I've got that covered.' That opens up all of those wonderful nuances that actors can give you with their eyes, their gestures, and so on."

On this movie, each scene involved a very specific approach. In general, I seem to prefer symmetrical compositions shot with wider lenses. I don't like things to be too wide, because I don't want things to get distorted. I basically find a symmetrical frame to be a bit unnerving; as a viewer, you can see so much, and it all looks so perfect, that you begin to feel a bit insecure. You're waiting for something to happen, and that's when I've got you — even though I haven't really *done* anything yet.

You've apparently incorporated that type of suspense mechanism into the film's train-crash sequence, because you never really show the crash itself. It's all about the *anticipation* of the crash.

Shyamalan: I wanted that sequence to go right up to the moment of the crash and then stop. Later on, you see the repercussions of the crash, but to me it's much more intriguing to show the 35 seconds before the accident happens — to show what that 34th second really feels like. I wanted to stretch out those 35 seconds and make sure the viewers understood every beat. During the shoot, we initially kept the sequence going a bit longer in order to show the first few seconds after the crash, but I eventually decided that it was more powerful to stop just before the impact.

Eduardo also mentioned that you don't generally like to shoot a master and a lot of close-ups.



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Shyamalan and his crew prepare a shot of a classically styled automobile.

Instead, you use more composed shots that are very carefully storyboarded.

Shyamalan: Well, there's hardly any coverage in this movie at all. The movie was shot to look the way it was originally planned. There was no other way to cut it, and there was no way to save the movie if it didn't work. It wasn't a case of, 'Let's figure it out in the editing room.' A ton of editing *was* done, but only with the intention of crystallizing the original vision. If we were dealing with a close-up of Bruce or Sam, that was all we had to represent that particular moment in the movie; we were never saying things like, 'Well, let's try the mid-shot of Bruce and Sam instead.' As a director, I find it important to take a stance and say, 'I have this image in my head, and let's do everything we can to make it happen.' I'd rather use the production time to realize that vision. I don't want to shoot a backup version — I want to spend every single minute of my time blocking and choreographing and working the camera to convey that original vision. And I have confidence that at least 90 percent of the time, that's going to be the right decision.

It sounds like a very controlled way of working. Do you allow much improvisation in terms of the acting?

Shyamalan: [Laughing] Not really.

I guess that means that you belong more to the Alfred Hitchcock

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school of directing.

Shyamalan: Yeah. I could walk you through one of my movies before we shoot it, and you'd be astonished at how close the original vision is to the finished film.

Have you found that actors will respond to that type of approach if your vision is strong enough?

Shyamalan: They'll respond to it if the *script* is strong enough. If the script has holes, and you ask them to stick to that specific blueprint, it can become a very tense situation. If the script has been worked on very carefully, to the point where it's watertight, then they're willing to go there. I think actors like it when a director says, 'This is what we're going for, and this is how I'm going to do it. Everything else is up to you. There are a thousand choices to be made in the next three minutes as I roll the camera, so go for it. You don't have to worry about all of the other stuff, because I've got that covered.' That opens up all of those wonderful nuances that actors can give you with their eyes, their gestures, and so on.

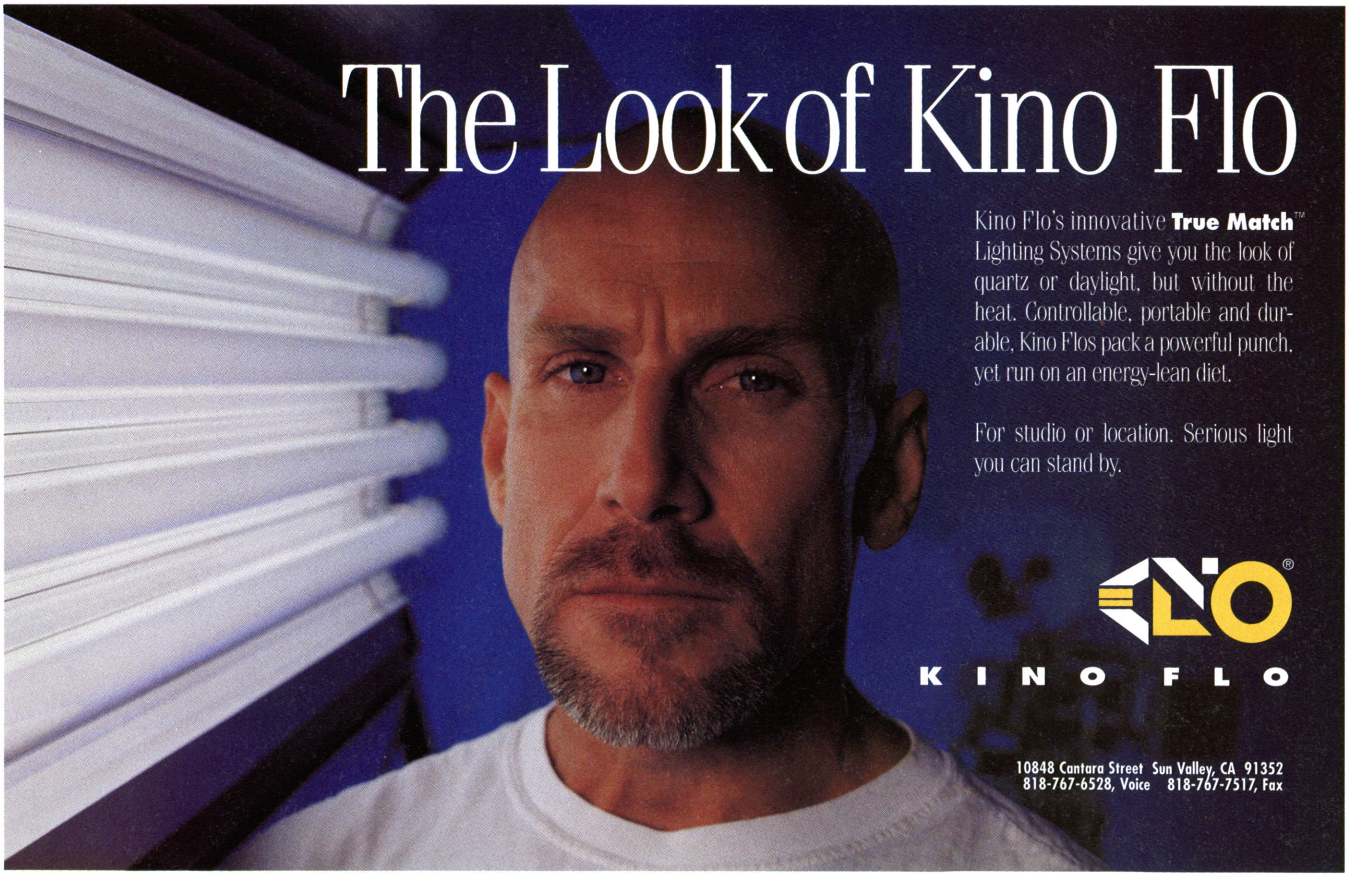
Of course, when we go to the set to block out a scene, I do leave room so we can adjust things for the actors if they feel uncomfortable. For example, if someone says to me, 'I wish I wasn't sitting down,' no problem — I can find a way around that. As we go through the scene, we can adjust the vision that's been planned for five months, but it's more about customizing that vision than rethinking it.

Given your penchant for control, do you prefer working in a studio or at real locations?

Shyamalan: It usually ends up being about 50-50. My first choice is to find a location where I can do the shots I've come up with, and where [the cinematographer] can do his lighting. Sometimes we'll find a location where we can do the camera move, but we can't light the scene properly. Eventually, it becomes very obvious which settings need to be built and which ones we need to find.

What was the most challenging aspect of *Unbreakable* from your perspective?

Shyamalan: [Laughing] All of it — the whole thing was very tiring and challenging. Unfortunately, I didn't make any of the scenes easy; I made it really hard for both the crew and myself. We shot the entire movie in continuity, and I made all of these demands, like my 'no coverage' rule. It was a super-challenging shoot both creatively and technically, but for me it became a very cathartic experience to pull it off. A movie like this one cannot be made in a half-assed way; it requires total concentration and commitment from everyone involved. ■



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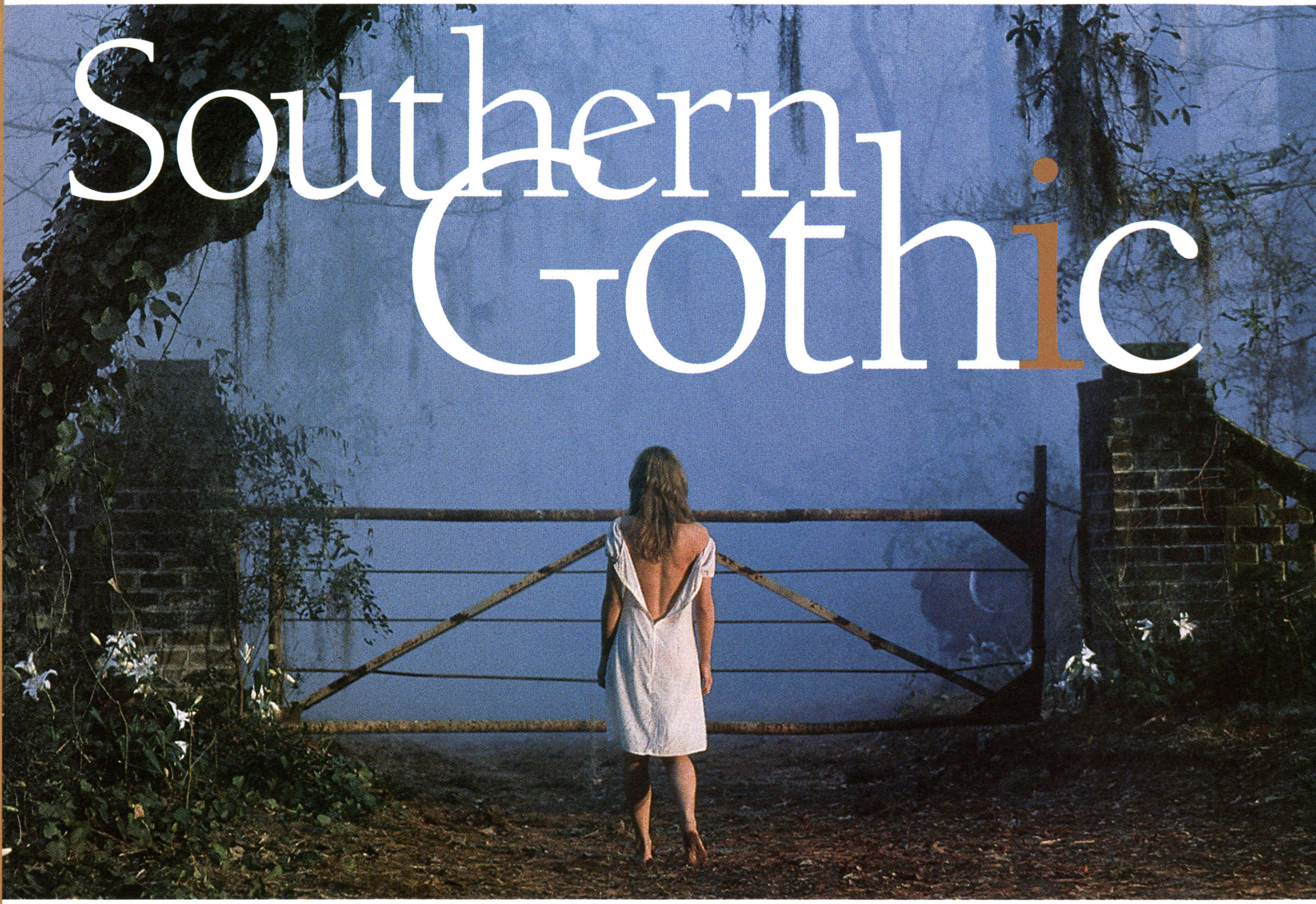

Shooting on location in Savannah, Georgia, director Sam Raimi and cinematographer Jamie Anderson lend supernatural events an authentic ambience in *The Gift*.

by Jay Holben

Unit Photography by Melissa Moseley

Director Sam Raimi is perhaps best known for the dynamic imagery and anarchic spirit of films such as *The Evil Dead* (1983), *Army of Darkness* (1992) and *The Quick and the Dead* (1994), but his last two features, the dark drama *A Simple Plan* (see *AC* Dec. '98) and the baseball-themed *For Love of the Game* (1999), were models of a subtler, more classical approach. Raimi continues that trend with his new film *The Gift*, a haunting and intimate thriller about Annie Wilson (Cate Blanchett), a young clairvoyant widow in a small Southern town who is asked to help find a missing young socialite, Jessica (Katie Holmes). Haunted by vague but disturbing visions of the woman's corpse, Annie struggles to solve twin mysteries: the location of Jessica's body and the identity of her killer.

Shot on an extremely modest budget and a tight schedule, *The Gift* challenged Raimi to use his 44 shooting days as economically as possible. "That was all the time we could afford," Raimi recalls, "which was outrageous for me. The quickest I had ever shot a film prior to this was 55 days on *A Simple Plan*, and *that* was really hard for me. *The Gift* had more effects, more locations and more characters, so I had to learn to work very quickly. Also, we had to be very frugal; we could have a crane when we needed it, but we couldn't have one for the whole show, so we had to be absolutely sure of what few days we needed it, and [we had to] use it right. In a way, that was really good, because it made me focus on what was absolutely necessary to tell the story."

Cinematographer Jamie Anderson (*Grosse Pointe Blank*, *What's Love Got to Do with It?*) concurs, "The biggest challenge of this film had to have been doing it so

Photos courtesy of Paramount Classics.

fast, because with such an amazing script and cast, you naturally want to spend time doing it right. In terms of the scheduling, we had to keep up more of a television-movie approach than a theatrical approach."

Fortunately, Anderson has gained considerable experience on low-budget productions; in fact, he often jokes that he's an alumnus of "Roger Corman University." After graduating from New York University's film program and moving to Los Angeles, he found work as a second-unit cameraman on Corman's *Night Call Nurses*, which was directed by Anderson's NYU classmate Jonathan Kaplan. After serving as an operator on films such as *Ferris Bueller's Day Off, Harry and the Hendersons* and *Dick Tracy* — as well as photographing Joe Dante's *Hollywood Boulevard* and the Corman classic *Piranha* — Anderson got his first big break thanks to Kaplan, who hired him to shoot *Unlawful Entry* in 1991.

The cinematographer says that these early experiences taught him some lessons that proved useful on *The Gift*. "Having a game plan is the best offense against tight schedules," he asserts. "When you're working quickly, you really have to be thoughtful about what you're going to do at a particular location. The last thing you want to do is to walk onto the set and just start from scratch. Being very clear with the director during location scouts is a must, and when you eventually hit that location during production, you've got to make sure that you [remember] what you talked about before and that you're running on all eight cylinders right off the bat. I can't say enough about the importance of anticipating problems beforehand — you've got to visualize what can go wrong and be ready for it. That's an invaluable skill.

"On this picture, there was no way we could have survived without a rigging crew," he continues. "The gaffer, Dave Morton, and the rigging crew, Dave Dunbar and Greg Banta, did a great job of making sure that as much as possible was done on each set before we got there. Otherwise, the clock would have been running us down daily."

Opposite page: Annie Wilson (Cate Blanchett) wanders through an eerie, fogbound landscape as she experiences a psychic vision. This page, top: Hot-tempered wife-beater Donnie Barksdale (Keanu Reeves) threatens Annie with a voodoo doll. Below: After disappearing without a trace, promiscuous socialite Jessica King (Katie Holmes) makes a disturbing, spectral appearance in Annie's bathtub.

Anderson reveals that one of his visual references for *The Gift* was the still photography of Walker Evans. "This is a simple story that takes place in a small town, and I wanted it to be simply told through the photography," he offers. "[Evans] has always been a favorite of mine. Much of his work was done in the South, [and many of the pieces are] very simple portraits and landscapes with really powerful compositions. That idea was the starting point for how I approached *The Gift*.

"Generally speaking, I start by lighting the environment and then I close in on the characters. I always try to make [the lighting] as simple as possible, but much of the time a large part of your goal is to make [actors] look good, so you have to sweeten the lighting on them a bit. That invariably involves the use of soft keys and hard edges."

For the majority of *The Gift*, Anderson stuck with Eastman Kodak Vision 200T 5274 for both day exteriors and day and night interiors. He occasionally used Vision 500T 5279 for nighttime exteriors when there weren't enough resources to light to the 200 ISO. "I really like 74," he offers. "It has a wonderful quality that

Near right: Annie uses her Tarot cards to predict the future for Buddy Cole (Giovanni Ribisi), a slow-witted and emotionally distraught garage mechanic. The porch set was constructed on stage by production designer Neil Spisak. "That was a beautiful set, and we used it several times during the shoot," cinematographer Jamie Anderson recalls. "For the day sequences, I lit almost completely through the windows. We wanted the room to have a sense of the outdoor energy [swirling] around Annie — wind blowing through the curtains and the trees outside. I wanted the light to kind of find its way through the layers of the translucent curtains and touch her cards and her face, but at the same time, I wanted to keep the porch very subdued — warm, but not bright." Far right: Framed by a prop car door, Reeves prepares for an upcoming scene.

is applicable in just about any situation. 5279 is a great stock as well, but I find myself leaning more and more to 74 [because of its] smooth palette, fine grain and amazing latitude."

Anderson chose Panavision cameras and lenses for the show, and he notes that the Primo 4:1 zoom was an invaluable piece of his arsenal. "I probably shot about 90 percent of the film on the 4:1, primarily at T2.8," he says. "Sometimes I found myself opening up one-third of a stop when the light was a little low or jumping to a T2.8/4 split when I had the room, but for the most part I tend to hover right around T2.8. I'm not sure why. I think you train your eye to see a certain level of light, especially when you use one primary stock, and it gets muddled if you venture too far outside of that range. I'm happiest around a T2.8; that stop strikes a nice balance between a good depth of field and plenty of separation."

One of the key challenges Raimi and Anderson faced on *The Gift* was finding a compelling way to present Annie's many visions of the future, each of which required its own unique style. "When we first met, Sam and I talked quite a bit about the different vision sequences in the movie," Anderson recalls. "There were several of these moments in the script, and each had a different subtext. [For example,] one of Annie's first visions is of her grandmother's appearance in the backyard. Her grandmother, we come to understand, has long since passed away, but the vision comes at an unexpected moment and has an unsettling air of reality that is confusing for Annie. We didn't want to complicate that moment with any visual trickery; we wanted the audience to be just as unsure as Annie is about whether it's really happening, so that when the stormy sky appears overhead, it has a real impact.

"In another, more dreamlike vision, Annie finds herself walking down a dark country road to the place where Jessica's body is hidden," he continues. "That has a much more lyrical and supernatural feel — [it feels like] a dream world. As Annie's visions occur more frequently and with greater clarity, our coverage becomes much more first-person so that the audience experiences those moments through Annie's eyes."

This calculated use of subjectivity is apparent throughout the film, particularly during several flashback sequences. One of these flashbacks shows one of Jessica's lovers, the hotheaded Donnie Barksdale (Keanu Reeves), recalling an argument that occurred during the duo's last encounter; in addition, the flashback of a bartender who witnessed the argument is also shown. "Two different characters recall the same moment, and we used different photographic treatments for [each recollection]," Anderson says. "We shot Donnie's recollection from a perspective that's close to the two of them, favoring Donnie's point of view. For the bartender's version of that moment, we pulled back and shot with longer lenses from a distance, separating him and the audience from that moment in a more objective manner."

In one of Annie's more bizarre visions, she sees Jessica's bound and

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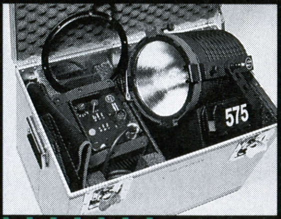

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Near right: Director Sam Raimi confers with actress Hilary Swank, who portrays domestic-abuse victim Valerie Barksdale. Bottom right: Cinematographer Jamie Anderson blocks out a shot with a group of young actors.

disfigured body floating amid the branches of an old, gnarled tree dripping with tendrils of Spanish moss. Raimi says he chose Savannah, Georgia, as the production's principal location primarily because of the dramatic, spooky cypress trees that populate the area. "These fantastic creatures with their gnarled arms and weird faces looked like something out of *The Wizard of Oz*," Raimi enthuses. "One of the premises of this movie is that the world of the supernatural exists, and we wanted to make that real for the audience. It was a great town to shoot in because it had these fantastic trees, which feel like they are not of this earth yet are an accepted part of everyday life. That puts the idea in the audience's mind that there are unexplainable things — fantastic, outrageous things — all around us, and they're very real."

Anderson says he was immediately struck by the "ghostly quality" of the trees. "They're such an interesting symbol and such a powerful presence in [Savannah]," he remarks. "They were immediately captivating — even though the trees are full of life, they have a sense of death about them. Sam immediately thought they should become a kind of visual thread [that would convey] dread throughout the picture."

Despite the trees' significant visual contribution to the film's ambience, Raimi still struggled with Annie's bizarre vision of Jessica's floating body. "That moment really troubled me," Raimi confesses. "I thought it was really a frightening and strange image, but I was concerned about the mixed metaphor of her floating in the tree. I knew it would look silly if I put her up in a tree on a wire, and if I composited her in as a blue- or greenscreen effect, I was afraid she would still look odd and 'stuck in.' So we played a bit with the idea of the tree being underwater life; we shot the background scenery as a plate at 42 or 72 fps with fans blowing all of the Spanish moss around, so it had a kind of underwater feeling to it. [We thought that if we did that,] the background plate wouldn't just vomit out the image of [Jessica's] body floating in mid-air. Jamie then thought we should shoot the Jessica element underwater so that she would literally appear to float in the tree. When we shot the separate element with Katie Holmes and [visual-effects supervisor] Peter Donen, we put her in a pool and photographed her against a greenscreen, then composited that with the high-speed moss blowing around to complete the effect. It all sounds so simple now, but it was a bit tough to come up with that whole moment and make it right."

The filmmakers also strove to lend interiors a compelling atmosphere. One set featured prominently in the movie is Annie's enclosed porch, where she earns a living telling fortunes for the locals. The porch was not part of the house used on location, however; it was constructed on stage by production designer Neil Spisak. "That was a beautiful set, and we used it several times during the shoot," Anderson recalls. "For the day sequences, I lit almost completely through the windows. We wanted the room to have a sense of the outdoor energy [swirling] around Annie — wind blowing through the curtains

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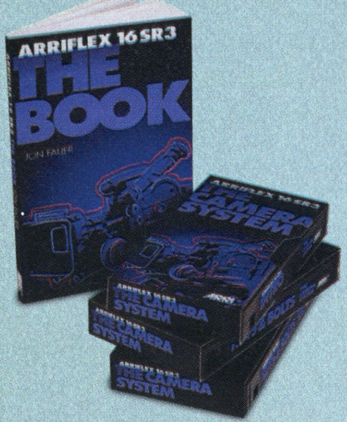
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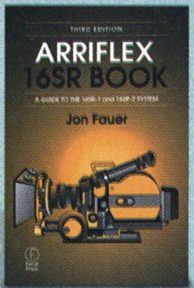
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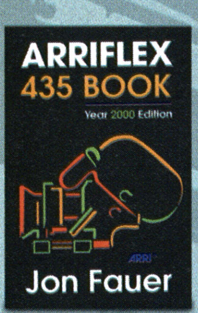
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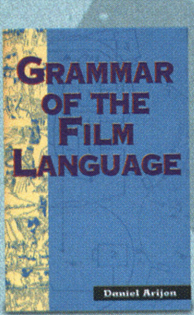
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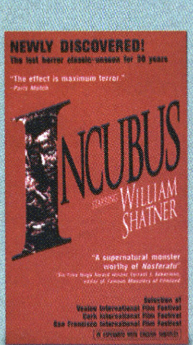
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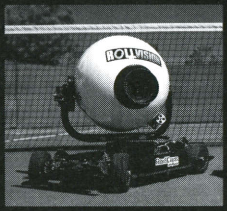

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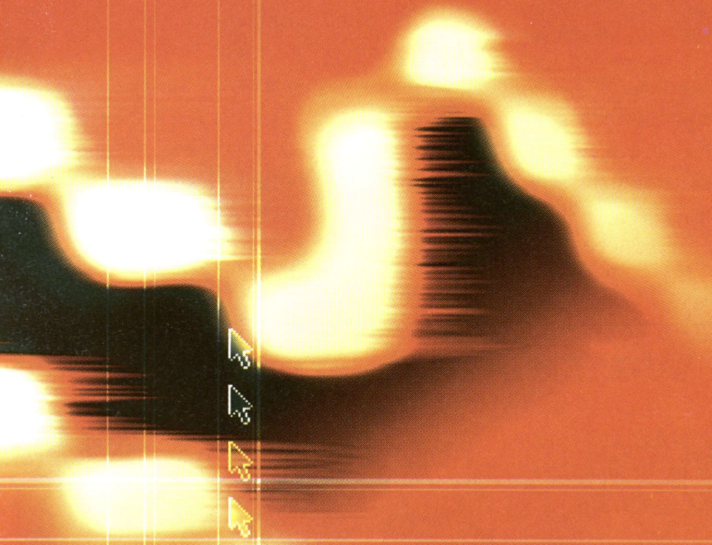
and the trees outside. I wanted the light to kind of find its way through the layers of the translucent curtains and touch her cards and her face, but at the same time, I wanted to keep the porch very subdued — warm, but not bright.

"A lot of [that lighting] was just done through the windows, with two 20Ks on the larger side of the room and 10Ks covering the rest of the area. We'd carefully shape the light coming through the windows by strategically positioning the curtains or by placing bits of tape on a window screen to add a slight bit of breakup. I also had quite a bit of light hitting the trees outside the window to keep the foliage pretty bright. When you're on a stage and you can see out the windows, [the view] just doesn't look real. We didn't have the space or money to create a proper backyard, so I tried to heat up what we had as much as possible to give it a natural feel. We also worked to vary the feeling of the light from day to day in the story. On some days the look is bright and sunny, and on others it's moodier, softer and more foreboding."

Anderson says that his ability to make a stage look real is one of the skills he began to pick up while working with Corman. He honed his techniques while operating for cinematographers such as Vittorio Storaro, ASC, AIC; Conrad Hall, ASC; Tak Fujimoto, ASC; Allen Daviau, ASC; and John Alcott, BSC. "Making a set look real can be tricky — it involves a combination of design, set decorating and lighting," he observes. "Because I started out on low-budget features, I first lit practical locations, and then the impulse on a stage was to light the same way. But most of what I know about lighting I learned while operating for a lot of very talented cameramen. And of course, I've also learned by making mistakes! That's invaluable."

On *The Gift,* one of the larger locations Anderson had to tackle was



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The dead girl's fiancé, Wayne Collins (Greg Kinnear), wonders if Annie's psychic sleuthing will reveal the killer's identity.

a country club, where the soon-to-be-deceased Jessica attends a swanky party. The expansive location threatened the production's tight schedule, but Anderson approached it with a real-world eye that helped him break down the requirements. "A large location like the country club can be rather intimidating — it was a huge area with interiors and exteriors where there was no place to hide lights! During a location scout, I'll often take a good look around to see how the environment is lit in real life. Although you don't have to stick to that scheme, it's a great jumping-off point when you're planning a lighting strategy for a large area. In the country club's foyer and main room, I used a lot of Chinese lanterns because they're quick, they're easy and they give off a beautiful light. We usually had a PH-213 [250-watt] or a 500-watt lamp in them. If you can get one in close to an actor's face, the quality is just beautiful, but they're also very efficient and useful for creating a bit of ambient light in a room."

The film's climactic scene, which takes place at night near a wooded swamp, was even more challenging to illuminate — "a logistical nightmare," according to Anderson. "One thing I struggled with years ago was overlighting night exteriors," he admits. "It's a

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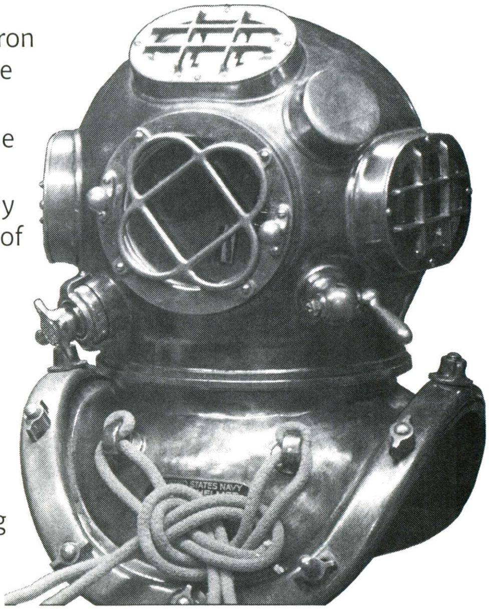

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delicate balance to achieve a realistic nighttime look and still be able to clearly see what's going on." To light the cypress trees surrounding the swamp, Anderson flew several sets of 18Ks and 12K Pars in Condors over the treetops, often aiming them through a frame of highlight in order to keep the light "sourcey" while slightly softening the edges. All of the HMIs were partially corrected with ½ CTO for a slightly bluish night look. "I like the ½ Blue for a night ambience, unless there's a reason to be more stylized," Anderson says. To provide key light on the actors, Anderson used 1.2K HMI Pars and 4K HMI Pars shining through large daylight Chimeras. He added soft fill by aiming a 20K through 20' x 20' muslin or Griffolyn bounces set off in the distance.

The crew captures a smooth crane shot of actors Kinnear and Blanchett as their characters investigate the fog-shrouded area where Jessica King's body was discovered.

"This film was a wonderful challenge, not only in treating the subject matter properly, but also in working quickly and not compromising the image," Anderson concludes. "Sam [Raimi] is a very visual and inventive guy with a wonderfully unique point of view. I always felt that I had to be on top of my game to help him bring his vision to the screen." ■

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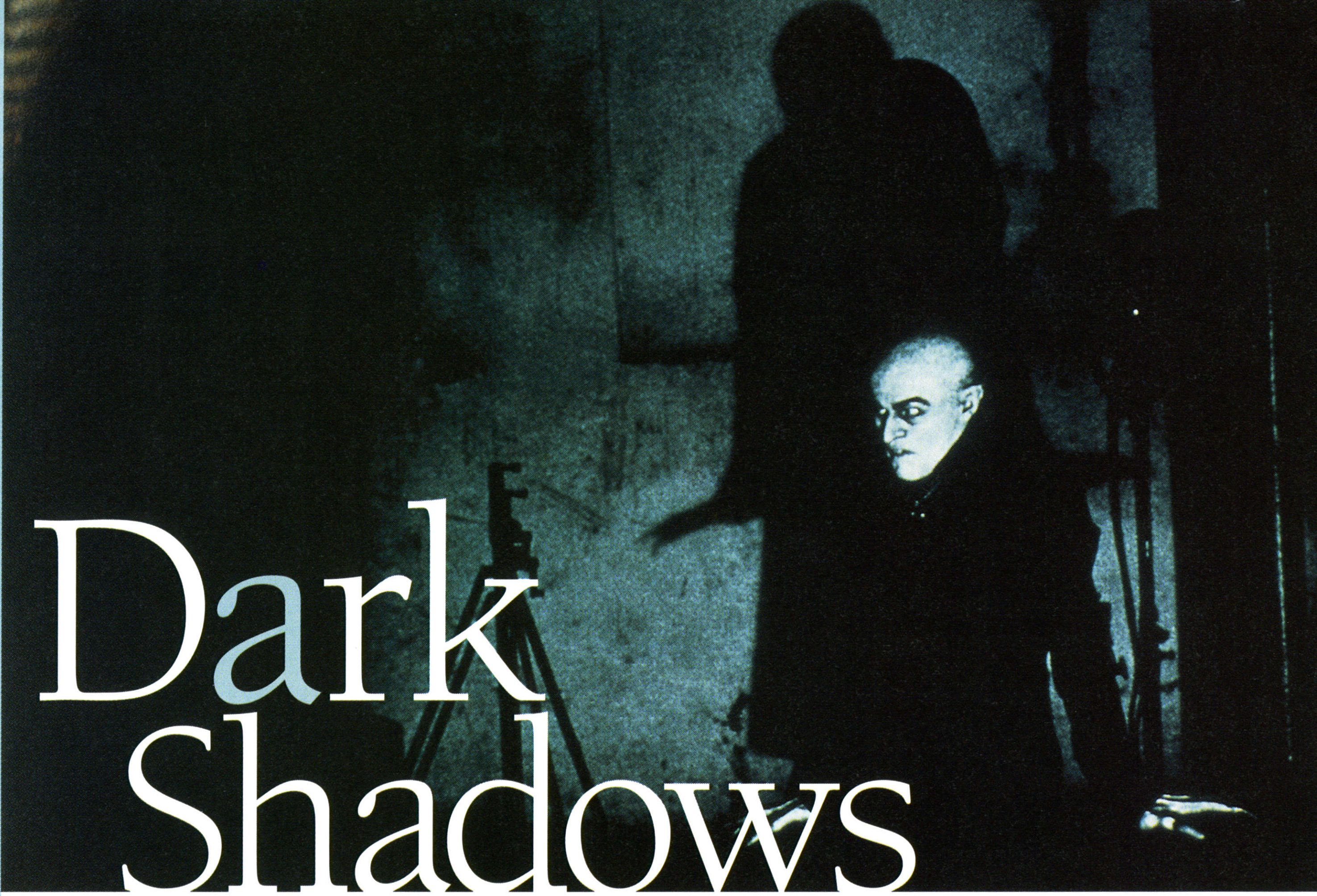


Dark Shadows

Director E. Elias Merhige and cinematographer Lou Bogue craft an appropriately Gothic look for *Shadow of the Vampire*, a wry, mythic take on the production of F.W. Murnau's *Nosferatu*.

by Ron Magid

Unit Photography
by Jean Paul-Kieffer

One could certainly cast *Shadow of the Vampire* into the category of "movies you never thought anyone would be crazy enough to make." The film centers on the shooting of F.W. Murnau's 1922 German silent film *Nosferatu* (the first cinematic Dracula) and posits that its star, the mysterious Max Schreck, was actually a *real* vampire to whom Murnau willingly sacrificed his cast — in order to satisfy the fiend's bloodlust and achieve absolute authenticity for the project. But director E. Elias Merhige and screenwriter Steven Katz weren't just interested in creating a pastiche of old horror films; they wanted to use Murnau and *Nosferatu* to create a riff on the theme of obsessive creativity, with director and star locked in a *danse macabre* of creation and destruction.

With only the little-seen, avant-garde *Begotten* (1991) under his belt, Merhige might have initially appeared to be an unlikely candidate to direct a film starring John Malkovich (as Murnau) and Willem Dafoe (as Schreck), but his passion for the subject won over first-time producer Nicolas Cage. "Murnau's *Faust* and *Sunrise* and *Nosferatu* are the kind of films that resonate deep inside you, but we weren't making an homage to Murnau," Merhige explains. "I wanted to use *Nosferatu* as a jumping-off point to explore the nature of vampires, which came into world culture at the start of the Industrial Revolution. The motion-picture camera was an outgrowth of that revolution, a black box that has an almost demonic power to take light and shadow from the living, then project it into dark theaters, where we become transfixed and completely transformed in many ways.

"What fascinated me was exploring the idea of the director as vampire, the method actor as vampire and, of course, the camera as vampire, which then becomes the ultimate 'puppeteer' of all the players," he continues. "For example, toward the end of the film Murnau says, 'If it's not in frame, it doesn't exist,' and you think at that moment that Schreck is going to attack him. But instead, Schreck obediently goes to his mark, and it's at that moment that Murnau and Schreck become

Photos courtesy of Lions Gate Films.

puppets to the camera! They become two individuals working out this hideous destiny of the camera's wishes. I love that."

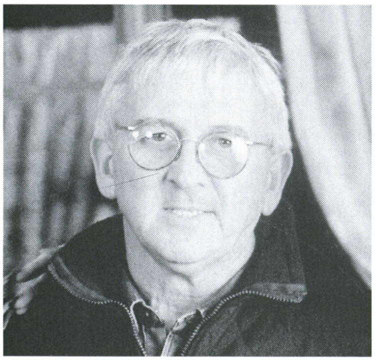
Merhige's previous film, *Begotten*, was an elaborate fantasy whose protagonists were God and "Son of Earth." He wrote, directed and photographed the mini-epic and even built his own optical printer and created all of the visual effects.

For *Shadow of the Vampire*, though, he assembled a top-flight British crew, including cinematographer Lou Bogue, production designer Assheton Gorton and makeup artists from Animated Extras. These craftspeople were asked not just to make a film, but to create a universe.

"Cinema is really about world-making," Merhige opines. "If you look at the early days of cinema, it really couldn't make up its mind whether it was a science or an art. Some of the earliest comments on the cinema compared it to a form of sorcery or magic, because you're in a dark room being hypnotized. I therefore wanted to show Murnau and his crew as a group of scientists going off into the void, marching into the jungle landscape of the Carpathians and becoming savages in the way that they exploit what's around them. I had hundreds of art books, particularly for the lighting, even [going] back to alchemy manuscripts from the 15th and 16th centuries. The way da Vinci chose certain minerals and flowers to create his colors is something that has always deeply inspired me as a director, because it's about choosing a color palette that will convince your subconscious mind that this story is authentic."

Merhige was just as particular about choosing a cinematographer to help realize his arcane vision. "I saw that the film had to be made in a very elaborate style, and I didn't want to compromise that," he states. "I interviewed many cinematographers, and one of the things I made clear to everybody was that we weren't making an homage to expressionism, we were making an expressionist film using [contemporary] technology and film stocks. The look I fought like mad to get was my interpretation of the early autochromes that were created at the turn of the century, which used potato starch to create a thin red, green and blue coating over an 8-by-10 black-and-white negative. When they were illuminated from behind, they had a translucent beauty and ephemerality, almost like a Seurat painting. I wouldn't settle for anything until we got there!

"It's not a desaturated look, it's much more complicated, and one of the things that turned me off to many cinematographers was that they kept talking about using bleach-bypass. [After awhile] I thought I'd have to shoot the film myself."



All of that changed when Merhige met Bogue. The cameraman had worked as a best boy for Stanley Kubrick and cinematographer John Alcott, BSC on *A Clockwork Orange*, and as gaffer on *Barry Lyndon* and *The Shining*, but his own shooting experience was limited to commercials. The contrast between working on a Kubrick production and *Shadow of the Vampire* was immediately apparent to Bogue. "Kubrick would ask me, 'How many different ways can you light this set?' I'd say, 'Six different ways,' and he'd say, 'Well, let's have a look at each one!' But that was different money and different times. The shortest shoot I worked on with Kubrick was *A Clockwork Orange*, which took eight months; we shot *Shadow of the Vampire* in six weeks!"

Shooting in the widescreen (2.35:1) Super 35 format, Bogue selected Arriflex 535 cameras outfitted with Zeiss Superspeed lenses from Arriflex in Munich. He chose a lighting package (provided by London's Jerome Lighting) that ranged from 1K to 20K tungsten

Opposite: The mysterious Max Schreck (Willem Dafoe) casts a tall shadow on the set of F.W. Murnau's *Nosferatu* in *Shadow of the Vampire*. This page, top: Murnau (John Malkovich) lines up a shot outside a castle under the watchful eyes of actor Gustav von Wangenheim (Eddie Izzard) and producer Albin Grau (Udo Kier). Bottom: Cinematographer Lou Bogue.

Schreck eagerly approaches his favorite scene, in which he will finally get the chance to bite the neck of his attractive leading lady, Greta Schroeder (Catherine McCormack).

lights and from 575-watt to 12K HMIs. Bogue then assembled a core crew of four Brits before heading to Luxembourg, where *Shadow of the Vampire* was shot on stages and at various locations; there he hired about 10 additional grips locally and from France and Germany. "We had a whole range of equipment for different situations," Bogue says. "We had more equipment than people, I think."

For scenes that replicated the making of *Nosferatu*, Bogue was determined to create an authentic look that would mirror the reality of shooting films in the 1920s. "I did a bit of research into old films before we started shooting," Bogue says. "I don't think a lot of people realize that the lights back then were never the same color temperature that they are now. They were always sort of yellow, so when we used antique lighting on the *Nosferatu* sets, I used Lee low-color-temperature yellow filters on the lights, combined with filters on the camera, to create a [similar] effect."

Bogue's approach and Gorton's painstaking production design were so successful that Merhige was actually able to open his film with a shot from Murnau's film of Greta Schroeder as the virginal Ellen Hutter, toying with a kitten in a balcony window, and then dissolve directly into a perfect recreation filmed nearly 80 years later, with Catherine McCormack playing Schroeder as Ellen. "I watched *Nosferatu* once and thought there was only one place that light could come from, so I bent the light around the window so that it came onto her face from the same side," Bogue recalls. However, that illumination was not generated by the same lighting unit we see in-shot beside Malkovich when the camera pulls back to reveal the entire film stage. "It was a big space, and you *think* that the [light on Ellen] comes from the unit that's shown — the one equipped with a Lee low-color-temperature filter to get that yellow effect," Bogue notes. "In actuality, we had to light that set twice, because we had to change the light when you saw Murnau and his crew."

Gorton, whose credits include Ridley Scott's *Legend*, recalls, "That was one of the first sets we built in this big, empty steel mill, which had been stripped down because we wanted great height. It was as accurate as we could get. [Murnau's studio] was a huge space that still exists in Munich, I think. They had elevated towers all around the place, so we built a big tower with Lucy's house set on it. Our period lights weren't quite as early as that, but the cameras and the camera equipment were. We were as careful about those matchings as we could be, and it was a strange, very surrealistic thing. When you're filming something being filmed, you actually pick up on a sort of magical theatricality, and I tried to provide that. We're not actually looking at what the camera is seeing; we're watching the camera looking [at its subjects]. One of the interesting things about this film is that it provides that backstage anarchy, which is often more interesting than the sets themselves!"

The vastness of the stage set and the unusual lighting instruments and filtration that were necessary to create the proper period feel might have created some serious issues, were it not for an unusual choice of film stock. Merhige says he first thought of marrying black-and-white and color stocks, so he could transition seamlessly from one stock to the other as the film segued from

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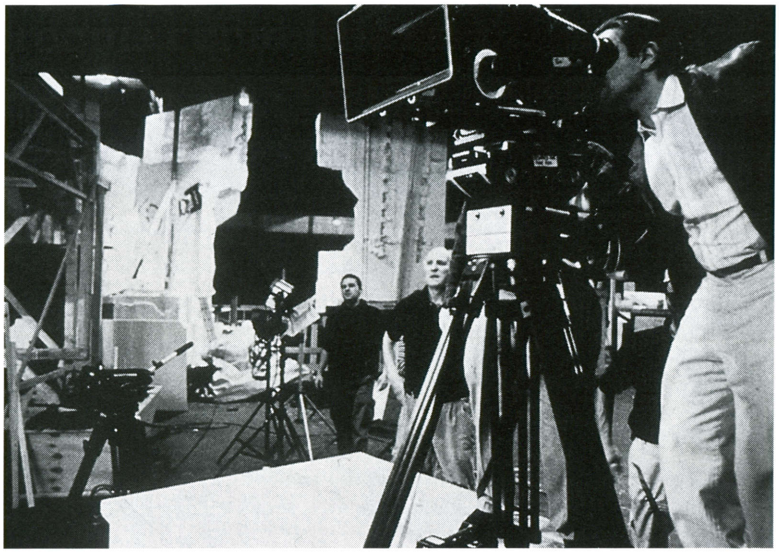
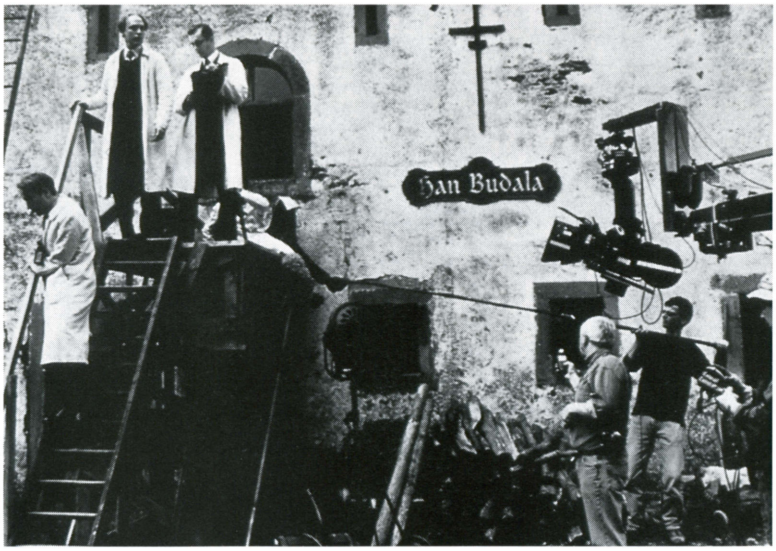




Top: Director E. Elias Merhige peers through a camera while production designer Assheton Gorton (center, with hands on hips) surveys the scene. Center: Bogue takes a light reading on location in Luxembourg, while Malkovich and John Aden Gillet (with clipboard) await their cue. Bottom: Murnau coddles his temperamental, undead star.

the making of *Nosferatu* to *Nosferatu* itself. "But then I did some tests with Kodak Vision 800T [5289] before meeting Lou, and I loved it!" Merhige recalls. "After I met Lou, we did a bunch of tests with four different film stocks, and there was no question that the reds we got with the 800T were remarkably different than the reds from all of the other stocks; the images began to hark back to paintings by Caravaggio or Rembrandt. Even so, everybody at Kodak said there wasn't a legitimate cinematographer on the planet who would shoot an entire movie on this stock!'"

Bogue was willing to go out on a limb, however, and the results were astounding. "I just said, 'You've got to go for it. This is what this new stock was made for,'" Bogue says. "We shot *Barry Lyndon* with candles, and that was 30 years ago! But even today, with modern stock and modern lenses, people just haven't got the [guts] to do it! I felt we had a tall advantage using that fast stock for interiors and night scenes, because we didn't have to use such big lights, and it's very rich in terms of the blacks. I didn't need hardware everywhere, and we didn't need such a big crew. But it's not a lazy man's stock — you've got to have eyes in the back of your head, making sure that no one leaves a door open when you're shooting on stage in daylight. For the exteriors, we used Kodak's 200 ASA stock [Vision 200T 5274], which was quite good in terms of matching."

Two castles in Luxembourg served as the castle of Orlok (Murnau's version of Dracula); one was used for interior scenes and the other for exteriors. Bogue worked closely with Gorton on the castle interiors — particularly on the exterior courtyard, where Eddie Izzard (playing actor Gustav von Wangenheim as hapless lawyer Thomas Hutter) first glimpses the reclusive Schreck as Orlok.

Rather than slavishly attempting to re-create the crude yet effective ratlike visage of Murnau's vampire, makeup artist Pauline Fowler and her crew chose to reimagine Orlok by enhancing Dafoe's own features. "When we were creating the makeup, we had the memory of *Nosferatu* in the back of our minds, which was the only way to capture the essence of the character," Fowler says. "If we'd looked at [the film closely], it would have been so tempting to try and do more. Willem's face is just perfect, so we deliberately kept as much of him as possible. How can you not?!"

Left: Dafoe takes some pointers from Merhige. Below: Dafoe, as Schreck, glides through an atmospheric cave.

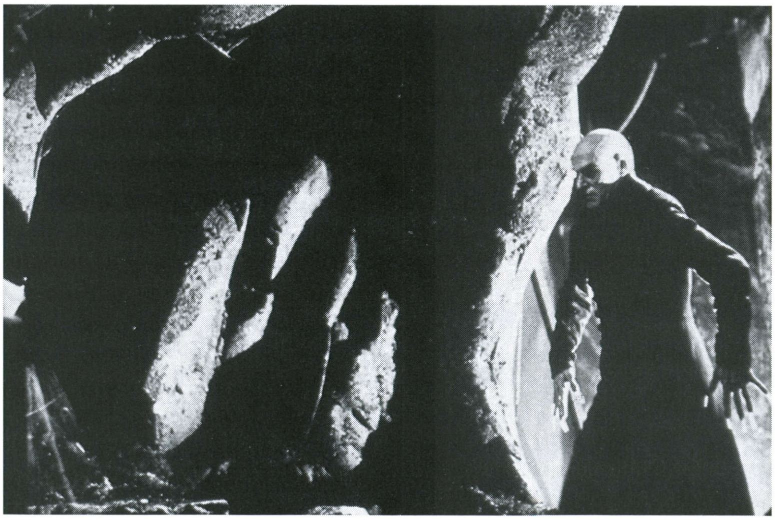
Bogue found that lighting the simple but elaborate makeup, which took up to five hours to apply, required some finesse. "I just had to be careful not to use too much toplight, because Willem had rubber all over his face, and if I used too much light you might start to see it. I just kept my eyes on it and adjusted the lighting and changed the filters on the camera [accordingly]."

In fact, the challenge in filming Schreck's eerie introductory scene, which was shot at night, was keeping the light almost entirely off the vampire. "I wanted you to sometimes think there was somebody there and to sometimes [wonder if there really was]," Bogue remembers. "The lighting had to be really down, very low-key, as Schreck came out of the hole he was living in. You've got to really look to see him. Jerome Lighting supplied some special lights with perfect black reflectors, which allowed us to create the hardest shadows. If I'd used the usual silver reflector, I might have gotten a double shadow off the bowl. I used just two small antique lights for Willem as he came out: one was to the left of the doorway, and the other was a bit farther back. I used the yellow filters to give those units an antique yellow look, and I added a Lee ⅜ Blue on my tungsten lights to create a cold moonlight effect.

"Because it was a real castle exterior, the ground was never level; it was very awkward to place lights, so we had to make do with plenty of sandbags to weigh things down," he continues. "I used some flags to block the light off Willem's face, so he moved in and out of light. One minute he's there, and the next minute he's gone. The light was very low, but I could read it on the meter and check it against a Polaroid."

The castle used for the interior of Schreck's decrepit abode was in a true state of disrepair. Gorton's crew made the location more presentable by supplying the raised platforms that would have been present when Murnau shot his film in 1922. "We were on location, in a castle, working on six-foot wooden rostrums *at night,* and the floor below the rostrums was *all rock*!" Bogue stresses. "We could have been working in a quarry. The castle's been sort of cleaned up for tourists, but it's not like a nice, flat floor — far from it! It's all rocks and boulders, and there were no safety rails like you'd have on a set. Our French grips put boards down for the actors to walk on. They used to laugh every day at building what they called a 'dance floor,' which was flat and perfect, so the camera could move all around and remain level. I can assure you that there was nothing flat in that castle — not even the road up to it!"

In fact, getting the equipment up to the castles was a logistical nightmare. "I'd send two English guys out in front with four local



After Von Wangenheim (portraying hapless attorney Thomas Hutter) cuts himself, Schreck is unable to suppress his blood lust.

blokes, and they'd get everything ready," Bogue recalls. "Those castles were on the sides of mountains, so we couldn't just drive a truck up there. Everything was either [carried] or put in little pick-ups and taken up to the top. And when we got there, we sometimes had nowhere to put lights! We built some 80-foot towers on the castle grounds and put our lights on those. Of course, there's no electricity there, so we had to bring our own generators. At one location, there was a steep, rocky road, and the crew had to wedge the front of the generator up about six feet at the front to keep it level — otherwise, it would have burned out. The sparks [electricians] then had to run one piece of cable 400-500 feet up from there, and it had to be ready when we arrived. We didn't have time to mess about; we had to keep [the shoot] moving all the time."

One of the most demanding locations for Bogue and his crew was an ancient barn in northern Luxembourg that Gorton transformed into an inn replete with fireplaces. "If you went into that set today, you'd wonder how we filmed there," Bogue says. "We couldn't stand up inside, and there was nowhere to put lights because we couldn't strike a wall and [place] our lights. It had nothing to do with a shortage of equipment; it was a shortage of space! We couldn't hang stuff because the barn was hundreds of years old and the ceiling beams were rotten; we couldn't even bang nails into them. I wanted there to be a lot of red in the inn set, because it was supposed to be lit by fireplaces

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and oil lamps. I placed Chinese lanterns out of shot with gold reflectors to provide that bit of warmth that comes from oil lamps, and I used lots of tricky things to create that effect. The lights were on dimmers, so I could vary [the level] by eye. Meanwhile, Gorton had built a fireplace in the corner with a gas line, so I could control the flames in the brazier. When we could see the fire in the shot, I'd turn the flames down, and when we didn't see the fire, I'd turn the flames up, so that [served as] a light source as well."

Bogue often relied on a Polaroid camera to check his lighting plan — a technique pioneered by Alcott on a number of Kubrick films. "John would never do a film without me, so I know all of his tricks," Bogue says proudly. "[While shooting *Shadow of the Vampire*,] some days I'd stand and look up in the sky, and people would think, 'What is he doing?' I knew Stanley and John were looking down on me, saying, 'Well, here we go again! Another old trick!' Stanley and John were good teachers. When we went from black-and-white footage [simulating shots from *Nosferatu*] to color in our film, I used some of Murnau's ideas and some of my own, and I also used a Polaroid camera to shoot black-and-white stills so I could look at my black-and-whites, too."

Together, Merhige and Bogue created images in *Shadow of the Vampire* that are extremely evocative of Murnau's silent classic — yet they also managed to create their own unique universe. "I always saw correlations between Murnau's film and real life," Merhige observes. "In *Nosferatu*, the death ship that arrives in Bremen is sort of like the cinema, in the sense that we export ideas, philosophies and culture to every corner of the globe, and some of the more delicate cultures are sometimes shattered by that. Making this film felt like going out on a limb with no time for any corrections. If we didn't shoot something properly one day, we didn't have another day to make it up — it was out of the movie! But this picture became a truly collaborative process, which is what I've always dreamed that filmmaking could be." ■

Too preoccupied to realize that dawn has crept up on him, Schreck is reduced to ashes by the morning sun.

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Elusive Tunes

Songcatcher, directed by Maggie Greenwald and photographed by Enrique Chediak, travels to Appalachia to unearth the roots of a distinctly American music.

by Jean Oppenheimer

Unit Photography by Gene Page

Photos courtesy of Trimark Pictures.

After shooting *Boiler Room,* a testosterone-fueled morality tale about greed and corruption in the brokerage business (see *AC* April '00), South American-born cinematographer Enrique Chediak was looking for a project that had a completely different sensibility. He found it in *Songcatcher*, a turn-of-the-century drama about a female musicologist who travels to Appalachia's Blue Ridge Mountains to search for the roots of American folk music. "*Boiler Room* was cold, masculine, contemporary and very urban," remarks Chediak, speaking by phone from his home in New York. "*Songcatcher* is a period piece, rural, green and feminine. It required a different pace and different types of shots.

"The composition in *Boiler Room* was much more modern," he notes. "It had more activity, and you didn't have to take a lot of care with each frame because the rough movement of a handheld camera and jump-cutting actually enhanced the story. For *Songcatcher*, we took a more pictorial approach. The shots were more composed, with many references to the pictorial world."

In the space of just a few short years, Chediak has proven himself remarkably adept at a wide range of visual styles, picking up a shelfload of awards in the process. Born in Ecuador and educated in Chile, he entered New York University's graduate film program in 1992 and went on to win the Best Cinematography Award at the university's First Run Film Festival for three of his short films. His thesis film, *El Rio*, shot in the Ecuadoran rain forest, was named Best Student Short at the 1998 Hamptons Film Festival and won Best Student Short and the Audience Award at the 1998 Shorts International Film Festival. Chediak also picked up the 1997 Best Cinematography award at the Sundance Film Festival for his work on Morgan Freeman's *Hurricane Streets*. His feature credits also include *The Faculty*, *Desert Blue* and *Getting Off*.

In formulating a visual style for *Songcatcher*, writer/director

Maggie Greenwald (*The Ballad of Little Jo*) told Chediak she wanted a look that was both naturalistic and magical. During her research, she had discovered the work of a little-known American photographer named Wynn Butler. His black-and-white images of figures in the woods, taken between 1950 and 1970, captured the storybook quality she wanted to evoke in the film. What she *didn't* want was the hard, gritty look typical of Walker Evans or Dorothea Lange, whose stunning photographs exposed the poverty of rural America.

While Appalachia's distinctive geography — dark, swampy forests, eroded mountains, and shimmering green "hollers" — played an obvious role in the shaping of the film's visual style, the real jumping-off point proved to be the music. "This is where music is a part of life, like the air you breathe," declares a character in the film, and Greenwald wanted the images to reflect the very simple and unadorned quality of that music. The songs themselves consist largely of *a cappella* renditions of folk tunes and ballads brought to America by waves of immigrants and passed down through generations of mountain people.

Songcatcher — an old mountain term for someone who collects songs — follows the city-bred Dr. Lily Penleric (Janet McTeer) into the heart of Appalachia. Dragging a bulky, primitive recording machine behind her, she attempts to infiltrate the fiercely protective and insular world of the mountain people, but initially meets with resistance and resentment. Over time, however, that hostility and mistrust is transformed into friendship and respect.

Both Greenwald and Chediak consider the picture a musical.

Opposite page: Set at the dawn of the 20th century, *Songcatcher* focuses on Dr. Lily Penleric (Janet McTeer), a musicologist who travels to the heart of the Appalachian Mountains to record the region's music. This page, top: Dr. Penleric finds herself attracted to mountain man Tom Bledsoe (Aidan Quinn). Bottom: Cinematographer Enrique Chediak and director Maggie Greenwald discuss an upcoming shot.

Rather than enhancing the songs with a lot of camera movements or fancy filmic devices, however, they opted for simplicity. "We focused on the faces of the singers, and simply let the faces and the music speak for themselves," confirms Chediak.

Songcatcher was photographed on a tight 28-day schedule in August of 1999. Everything was filmed on location in the Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina. Given the region's rough terrain, Chediak decided to shoot the project with two Moviecam Compacts. "We had to carry all of the equipment by hand," he says. "The Compact is light and works well under harsh conditions."

Quinn and Greenwald take a short break on location in the Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina.

A Steadicam was employed for one day (to photograph a barn dance), and an Arriflex 3-C was used for a scene of Lily running through the forest, fleeing a mythical panther. "We got the Arri strictly for that scene," notes Chediak. "It's very small and light, and it takes a 200-foot magazine." A normal array of Zeiss Superspeed lenses rounded out the camera package.

Chediak estimates that 90 percent of the film was shot on Kodak Vision 500T 5279, but in a few instances he found the conjunction between that stock and the Vision printing stock to be a bit too contrasty, so he switched to EXR 5293. These instances include a scene outside an old woman's cabin, and one in which Lily and her schoolteacher sister, Elna (Jane Adams), clean up after a fire has destroyed their home.

While shooting day exteriors, the filmmakers relied almost exclusively on natural light. Perhaps more than any other piece of equipment, Chediak depended upon his sunPATH, a computer program developed by cinematographer David Parrish that forecasts the exact point where the sun will be at a given time on a given day. The sun's position affected almost every shot in *Songcatcher*, and Chediak says that a lot of preproduction time was spent mapping out when certain shots would have to be made.

"Maintaining the consistency of the image was a big challenge," acknowledges gaffer Joe Quirk, who also worked with Chediak on *Boiler Room*. "The weather wasn't too bad; we experienced normal storms here and there, but in terms of sun and clouds you can't tell what's coming at you from over the mountain. The constant, unpredictable shifts from cloud cover to hard sun made it difficult to maintain consistency within scenes. To play it safe, we shot under silks where possible."

An example of this occurred at a cabin belonging to an old mountain woman named Viney (Pat Carroll), where a 20' x 20' silk was combined with one that was 12' x 12'. This silk cover began at the cabin's roof and extended out about 20 feet. "It was like an extension of the roof, although you couldn't see it on camera," says Chediak. "The great advantage of that tactic was that [the surrounding greenery] absorbed light, so we didn't feel that much difference between the characters who were under the silk and the area that was in direct sun."

The sun occasionally proved so strong that it had to be toned down. At the cabin of another character, a 20' x 20' black solid was placed on top of the silk. If more light was needed, the solid could be pulled out of the way; if less light was needed, it was pulled up. "The sun there can be really harsh on skin tones," notes Quirk, who had worked on another film in the region a few months earlier. "Actors can't help squinting, and you're constantly fighting the contrast. The women's costumes included those wide-brimmed hats that were fashionable in 1907, and for some wide day exteriors we laid bleached muslin on the grass for them to walk across, so the sun would bounce up and fill in the area underneath the hats. That technique creates a much more flattering light by decreasing the contrast."

Day interiors, such as a scene of Elna and her lover sitting at their respective desks, also made use of the muslin, which was then stretched out on the floor. Illumination came from outside the window; sometimes a 4K Xenon was bounced off a mirror, and sometimes an HMI Par was played direct. The light streaming through the window bounced off the muslin, providing a soft underglow rather than hitting the actors with a direct light.

While the North Carolina landscape was predominantly green, Greenwald wanted to bring out subtle differences in the color in order to suggest a variety of loca-

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SALUTING A LEGEND

LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD RECIPIENT: VITTORIO STORARO, ASC, AIC

The American Society of Cinematographers (ASC) will honor the life and work of Vittorio Storaro, ASC, AIC in the February 2001 issue of *American Cinematographer*.

Mr. Storaro will be presented with the Society's Lifetime Achievement Award at the 15th Annual ASC Awards ceremony, which will be held on February 18, 2001 at the Century Plaza Hotel in Los Angeles.

The February 2001 issue of *American Cinematographer* will feature an extensive editorial review of Mr. Storaro's achievements.

Mr. Storaro has earned Oscars for his innovative cinematography on *Apocalypse Now*, 'Reds' and '*The Last Emperor*.' He received a fourth Academy Award nomination for *Dick Tracy*. He is one of the very few cinematographers to earn three Oscars. Storaro has also worked on such seminal films as *The Conformist, 1900, Last Tango in Paris, Luna, Tucker: The Man and His Dream, Ladyhawke* and *Bulworth*.

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Above: The crew gets ready to film a performance on a cabin porch. "We let the faces and the music speak for themselves," Chediak says. Below: Greenwald (with headphones) and Chediak film an outdoor luncheon.

tions, as well as to reflect the different phases of Lily's emotional and psychological journey. "For the scenes in which she first comes to the mountains, we wanted to make the woods seem very dark and rich, mysterious and almost frightening," says the director. "Then there's a moment in the film when love is perfect for everybody [Lily falls in love with a mountain man, while her sister is involved in a long-term lesbian relationship], and the greenery is lighter and almost shimmers. The house where Alice Kincaid [Stephanie Roth] lives, with too many children, is much darker and feels as if it's enclosed in the woods. On the other hand, Viney's cabin is out in the sunshine and feels very earthy."

Rather than employ filters to bring out differing shades of green, Chediak relied on the blue tones in his film stock. "When we were inside the woods, we didn't correct at all for daylight, which gave the film more of a blue look," he reveals. "For the scene in which Lily comes out of Alice's house after Alice has given birth, we only half-corrected in order to create a cool tone. Lily was coming from a very intense experience, and we didn't want her to come into a warm, happy world. We wanted it to have a cooler edge."

Noting that Lee's #122 Fern Green gel works particularly well with foliage, gaffer Quirk confirms that Chediak eschewed filtration whenever possible: "He is very minimal [in his use of filters]. For example, his moonlight is usually created with just a ⅛ Blue and a ⅛ Green." The moon itself is never shown in the film, although a couple of night scenes are illuminated by "moonlight" simulated by Dinos mounted on a Condor crane.

Chediak has high praise for his crew, which included camera operator Aurelia Winborn, 1st AC Amy Silverman and 2nd AC Alyson Latz. The production entailed a lot of handheld camera work and a lot of dolly shots. "You gain a healthy respect for gravity," jokes key grip John McEnerney, who doubled as dolly grip. "You can never leave anything unattended. The most difficult thing logistically was hiking equipment up steep paths and fire roads that we couldn't get up with trucks. We had to rope off trees, attach carts to the ropes and pull them manually.

"We also rented aluminum I-beams for the movie," he continues. "They're lightweight and rigid, so you can use them to level dolly tracks on difficult terrain; you just put the tracks on top of them. Down in North Carolina, aluminum I-beams aren't a film-equipment rental item — contracting companies and concrete workers use them."

McEnerney, who's picked up some of his tricks while working with several Hong Kong action crews, also devised a rigging system, complete with harness and pulleys, that was used both for transporting equipment across deep ravines and to assemble a bungee-cam rig used to capture two particularly difficult shots. "The system consists of a steel cable stretched between two trees and tightened with a come-along ratchet," he explains. "[Hanging from that] is a piece of steel pipe with

MEMBER PORTRAIT

LASZLO KOVACS, ASC

Digital photo by Owen Roizman, ASC. using the Kodak DC-290.

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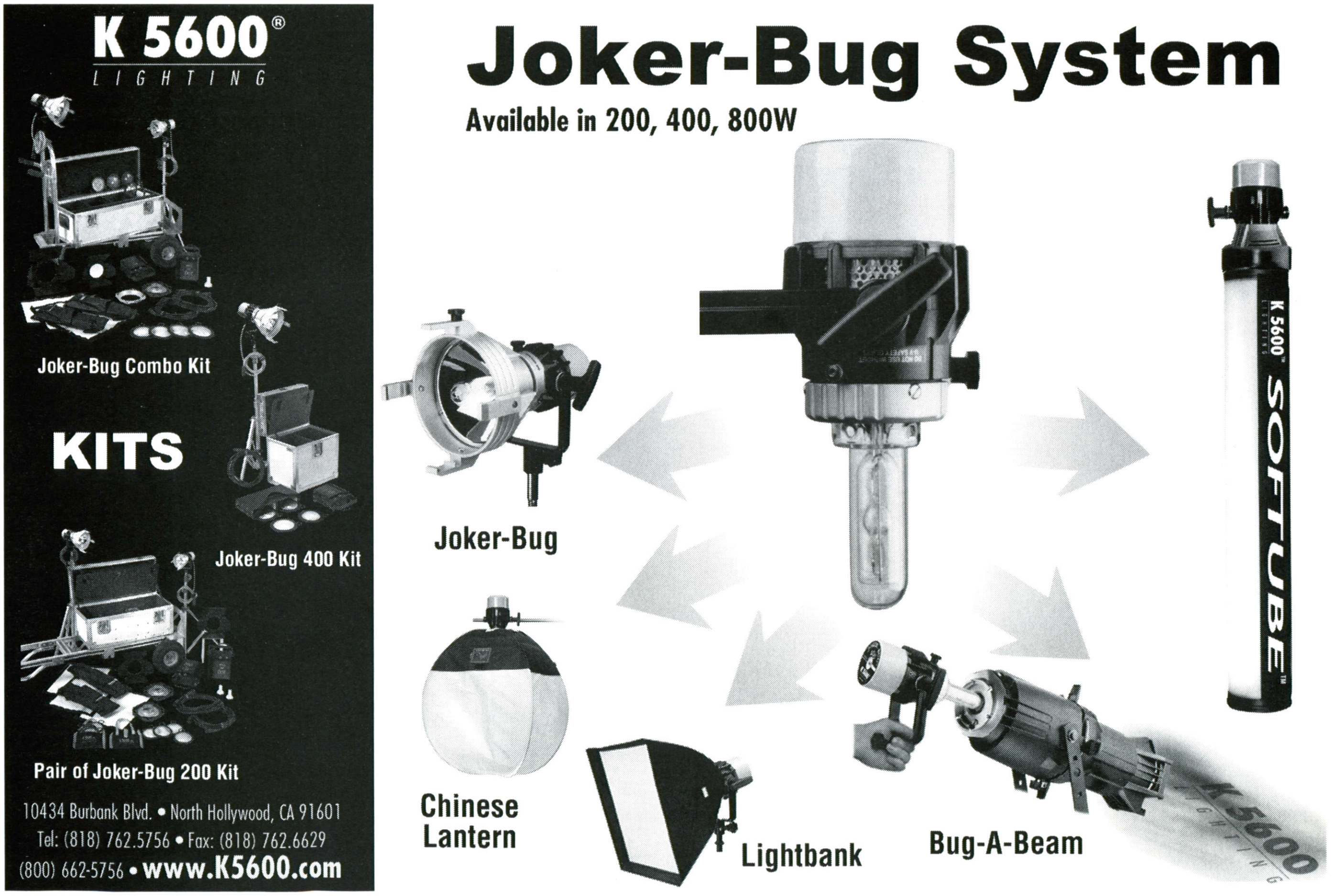
The play of light and shadow in the mountains enabled the filmmakers to create a rich palette, highlighting the dark and mysterious nature of the woods with an almost shimmering green hue.

pulleys on either end, attached with pipe clamps. It requires swivels and a special kind of cable pulley, which I got in Hong Kong. They're hard to find in the States; I tried to have them made, but it was too expensive, so I bought a bunch of them in Hong Kong two years ago."

The pipe traveled along beneath the cable, with Chediak, who operated on the tricky shots, hanging off the pipe in a stunt body harness. McEnerney then built a bungee-cam rig to hang in front of the cinematographer, who was able to operate the camera off the monitor. The rig was first used for a nighttime shot that traversed a small stream and gully some 60 feet across. The camera zeros in on Lily and a mountain boy, who unexpectedly come upon a moonshine still while walking through the woods. At one point, Chediak was 12 or 15 feet off the ground; he then came to a stop right in front of actress McTeer and the boy as they came down the path.

McEnerney hung the rig at a slight downhill angle. "We figured out what we wanted to see and where Enrique had to land to get it," he recalls. "I would just feed out the rope attached to the pipe. I was wearing a climbing harness with an ascender on it [used as a rope brake in mountain climbing] and I could feed it out at whatever speed Enrique needed." While discussing this challenge and others, McEnerney repeatedly praised his crew: Gene Coffey, David Troutman and best boy Daryl Blevins. "They were old hands at working in that region, and they were



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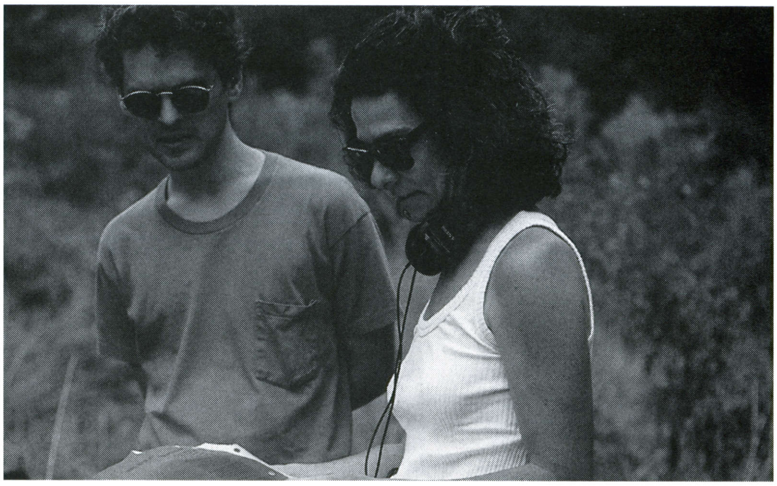
Greenwald checks her notes during a break.

A scene in which Lily races through the forest pursued by a legendary, invisible panther also employed the complicated pulley system. For that sequence, the cable was hung between two trees roughly 150 feet apart so that the camera could keep pace with the increasingly terrified woman as she tries to flee.

The production used Chinese lanterns and Fresnels, all placed on dimmers, to illuminate the film's interior night scenes; at the turn of the century, Appalachia had no electricity, so oil lamps provided the only illumination. Night interiors in Viney's cabin were lit with one Chinese lantern containing a single 250-watt ECA bulb and a couple of Tweenies to separate the characters from the background. A dance in the barn was lit with a half-dozen Chinese lanterns suspended from existing ceiling beams. They contained 500-watt and 250-watt bulbs dimmed down; 1K Baby Fresnels were used for separation.

Chediak says he is very pleased with how the film turned out. He notes that he would have preferred more overcast skies, which he feels might have enhanced the film's mood even more, but he points out that this is a common lament among cinematographers. Poison ivy and mosquitoes aside, he realizes how fortunate the production was. "In 28 days of shooting, we didn't have any cover sets to fall back on," he reveals with a laugh. "I'd say we were pretty lucky." ■

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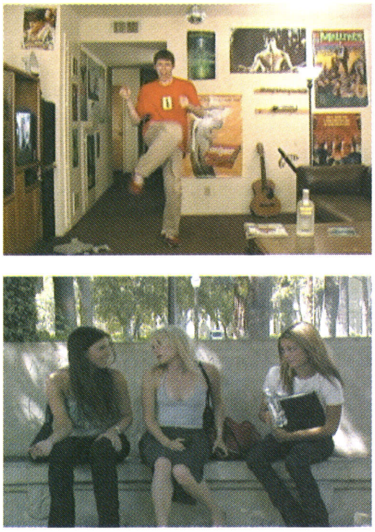
Indies on the Internet

Scores of new Web sites offer ambitious independent filmmakers an outlet for their projects — but is this growing trend a healthy one?

by Neil Matsumoto



Frames courtesy of Nibblebox.com.

Thanks in part to the Dogma 95 film movement and Thomas Vinterberg's 1998 film *The Celebration,* digital technology and its "DIY" (Do It Yourself) ethics have revolutionized both the film industry and the medium itself, much like the French New Wave did in 1959. In the United States, the wide releases of independent DV films such as Bennett Miller's *The Cruise* and Miguel Arteta's *Chuck & Buck* (see *AC* July '00) have caused a stir, and Hollywood has quickly jumped on the bandwagon. Even world-renowned filmmakers such as George Lucas and Spike Lee are getting in on the act: Lucas used Sony HD 24p digital cameras on the new *Star Wars* movie, and Lee photographed his latest film, *Bamboozled,* in Mini DV.

Because of this growing trend and the great advances in technology, we will soon see hundreds of independent films being produced by filmmakers who all have great hopes for fame, money and even artistic achievement. But there is one problem: where will we see all of these films? There are simply not enough distributors or theaters to accommodate every filmmaker's personal project.

Thus far, the only viable solution to the growing problem of distribution has been the Internet. According to Arbitron Research, more than 16 million people have streamed a video in the past year, and more than 100 million streaming-media players have been downloaded on the Internet. It's also predicted that consumer access to broadband will grow from two million subscribers today to more than 30 million by 2004. Even more fascinating is Forrester Research's prediction that by 2005, some 92 percent of U.S. online households will create and share personal multimedia content. With all of these factors coming into play, it's often said that the next *Blair Witch Project* will not be promoted online, but will actually *be* online.

In the main arena, the recent merger of AOL and Time Warner sent shockwaves throughout the business world and signaled a new type of collaboration between Hollywood and Silicon Valley. Following in the footsteps of online digital music distribution, a great number of online entertainment Web sites are streaming films in the hope that the Net will be the future screening space of new and exciting work. "TV execs have ditched their vision of a 500-channel universe," says journalist Laura Rich of *The Australian Industry Standard,* which has dubbed itself "the newsmagazine of the Internet economy." Instead, she adds, "they're banking on thousands of channels — surfed via mouse rather than remote control."

Many of these new sites are focusing on the thousands of unknown and struggling filmmakers who have not received wide distribution, or any distribution at all. With the lack of broadband in most households, most of these Web sites are starting with modest goals and are streaming short or animated films, which have a more feasible length for people who have slower, dial-up Net connections. And while online audiences and revenues are still small, the possibilities of this new outlet seem to be unlimited. In his keynote speech at the first annual Yahoo! Online Film Festival, Mandalay Entertainment CEO Peter Guber had some interesting thoughts about the future of online entertainment. "With a feature film being released into theaters, we have to market the film to millions," he said. "On the Internet, we will have to market to just one, but a million times over."

Perhaps the two online entertainment Web sites that have been getting the most attention in the press have been Atom Films and iFILM. Since starting up in late 1998, Atom Films (www.atomfilms.com) has been acquiring exclusive rights to short films, animation and digital media; the site generates revenue by distributing this content through TV networks, airlines, theaters, home video and the Internet. Keeping pace with the AOL/Time Warner merger, Atom Films has struck deals with Blockbuster, HBO, and Warner Bros., and has also established business ties with companies that produce handheld and wireless devices.

In addition to alliances with major companies, Atom Films has also developed relationships with celebrities and cutting-edge directors. For example, Atom recently teamed with Leonardo DiCaprio's Birken Interactive Studio to produce an international online short-film festival titled *The Savage Sideshow.* They also recently announced that director Spike Jonze (*Being John Malkovich*) has joined their advisory board and will help counsel Atom Films on the company's future direction. Atom will also exclusively distribute a number of Jonze's short films, including *Amarillo by Morning* and *How They Get There.*

Opposite page: On Nibblebox.com, *Virtual Rob* kicks up his heels and a trio of *Sorority Crimefighters* chat about, like, battling evil. This page: A selection of scenes from eye-catching shorts now streaming on Eveo.com.

Frames courtesy of Eveo.com

Following its launch in October of 1998, iFILM (www.ifilm.com) has become one of the leading resources for online film viewing. Very different from Atom Films, which functions somewhat like a traditional film distributor, iFILM is the first film portal and directory, linking viewers to more than 10,000 online films. Akin to a Yahoo! service for films, iFILM divides online films into different categories, including drama, action, international, experimental, spoof and student films. The site also has a section that attempts to target niche audiences, such as gay/lesbian, women and teens. Additionally, the portal links viewers and filmmakers to other things that relate to film, such as news, schools, festivals, production houses, studies and film trailers.

One of the big success stories from iFILM has been the short film *Sunday's Game,* which was directed by Gene Laufenberg and produced by David Garrett. Produced as a "calling card" while Laufenberg and Garrett were working on sitcoms, *Sunday's Game* was rejected by every film festival until iFILM president Roger Raderman approached the filmmakers about launching their short on his Web site. Compared to the typical film festival, which probably has a few hundred attendees, iFILM's showcase allowed *Sunday's Game* to be viewed by hundreds of thousands of people. "It's really hard to quantify what it did and didn't do," says Garrett. "But when it went up on the site, we were all unemployed writers." After the film was shown on the site, however, it received press coverage from *Variety, Entertainment Weekly, The Los Angeles Times* and *The New York Times,* which in turn generated a tremendous amount of buzz about the project. Based on the exposure and overall strength of the film, Garrett and Ward subsequently sold two TV pilot scripts to Fox and three feature-film pitches, one of which recently completed production at Disney. Director Laufenberg sold a pilot that he wrote and directed for MTV and has also inked

Right: A skydiver takes the plunge on iFilm.com. Below: An actress gets down to business in an iFilm short titled *Sunday's Game*.

a studio deal at Fox 2000.

In contrast to Atom Films and iFILM, a few other sites have adopted unorthodox business plans and a more grass-roots approach in attempting to lure viewers and filmmakers. Launched in the summer of 1999, San Francisco-based Eveo (www.eveo.com) is an independent video network that enables aspiring filmmakers to create short videos (dubbed "Eveos") that will premiere on the Web site. Most online entertainment companies, such as Atom Films, have a competitive selection process that's not unlike those used by traditional film distributors and festivals. What sets Eveo apart is that the site offers any individual an opportunity to showcase his work, as long as it hews to a simple requirement: a running time of three minutes or less. Eveo will also not accept home videos or pornographic material.

As a predominantly DV-based site, Eveo has assembled a creative advisory board that includes independent DV pioneers such as Bennett Miller (*The Cruise*), Todd Verow (*Frisk*) and Haskell Wexler, ASC (*Bus Rider's Union*). Eveo president and CEO Olivier Zitoun, who has more than 14 years of experience in the high-tech industry, has a very individualistic attitude about what his site will provide for filmmakers. "The Web has been very successful as a tool [for] letting people express themselves since the first days of the Internet, [from] chat rooms and bulletin boards to home pages and MP3s, [and] now video," Zitoun says. "Like the Internet, Eveo is truly about people and self-expression."

Based in New York and Los Angeles, Nibblebox (www.nibblebox.com) is another of the more interesting online entertainment sites on the Web. Created by TV executive David Bartis and film director Doug Liman (*Swingers, Go*), Nibblebox gives college students around the country cameras, sound equipment, funding and mentoring to allow them to create video, radio and animated content to be showcased on the Web. During their student days at Brown University, Bartis and Liman founded an organization called The National Association of College Broadcasters. They created Nibblebox for 18- to 24-year-old college students, who are usually the early adopters and innovators of the Internet.

The site has built a network of content creators by developing partnerships with campus TV stations, radio stations, film clubs and other creative groups. Students submit proposals for projects, which Nibblebox then puts through a selection process. The chosen projects are assigned mentors, who assist in the development and creation of the content; this program has already benefited from the participation of world-class filmmakers such as Steven Soderbergh (*The Limey, Erin Brockovich*) and Wim Wenders (*Wings of Desire*).

A good example of the type of programming Nibblebox offers is a show called *Virtual Rob,* which is both episodic and interactive. Each installment of the show features Rob, the first clickable human being,

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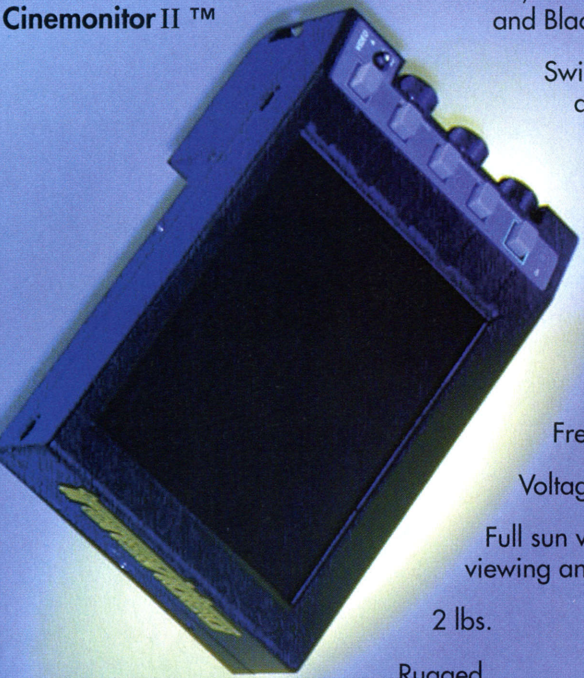

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standing in the middle of a different environment that is also clickable. If you click Rob's arm, something strange happens to it, and if you click a vodka bottle in the background, Rob will drink it, fall over and slap himself to sober up. Bartis firmly believes that Nibblebox has the strongest grass-roots philosophy of any site on the Web. "Nobody is out there developing grass-roots content, and nobody is giving people the tools to create content like we are," he maintains. "We like to say that we're [providing] both the physical tools and the intellectual tools."

In terms of profits, most Web sites have standard deals with filmmakers, although many of them differ. Eveo has a two-level agreement. The first is a non-exclusive deal via which Eveo pays the filmmaker $100 to stream his or her work on the site. Every time the film is viewed, the filmmaker makes 5 cents. If the film is one of the top picks, it will be acquired for exclusive rights, for which Eveo pays $750 in up-front costs. On top of that, the site offers the filmmaker 55 percent of the revenue for online and offline syndication. According to Zitoun, a filmmaker can make $100 on the low end and $1,500-$2,000 on the high end. Nibblebox requires the assignment of the rights to Nibblebox, but the site attaches the name of the creator permanently to the show in case he makes a deal to take the show offline into a TV series or feature film. Thus the filmmaker will always have an ownership position for the life of the project.

The press has given extensive coverage to the fact that many online entertainment companies are experiencing financial difficulties because of the lack of broadband in the mainstream and the general instability of tech stocks. Recently, Pseudo Programs Inc. (www.pseudo.com), one of the early pioneers of Web-based entertainment, announced that it had laid off all of its 175 employees after running out of money. "It's a little early to do what we do, but it's probably not too early," said CEO David Bohrman in a press release. "I think the funding paralysis that's out there in the economy, [which] happened after April, is what really stopped the flow of financing into this kind of company."

Perhaps the most well-known demise of an online entertainment company has been the turbulent saga of Digital Entertainment Network (DEN). During its short life span, the site raised over $26 million in its first round of financing but suffered financial woes, massive layoffs, management reshuffling, business-plan changes and a sexual-misconduct lawsuit that led to a filing for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection earlier this year. According to former DEN President David Neuman, the important element for success is to have financial backers with the will to succeed. "Every successful major media corporation of the past 20 years is inevitably a story of mistakes and/or patient investors who go through years of losing money," said Neuman at this year's Streaming Media East conference. "The venture capitalists in the Internet marketplace do not have the enthusiasm or patience anymore." Even Steven Spielberg's Pop.com, which was to Webcast video, animation and other programming created by big industry names, shut down before streaming even one byte of content.

Until the marketplace begins to take on a firmer shape, many filmmakers and cinematographers are sidestepping entertainment Web sites in favor of their own sites, where they can showcase their films or reels. L.A.-based director of photography Matt Uhry has clips of his reel on his site, www.fuzby.com, which showcases his work as a cinematographer on feature films, commercials and music videos. According to Uhry, the technical process is easier than one might think. He had a version of his reel on Mini DV, which he then captured into his computer using Media Cleaner Pro, which allows the user to capture, enhance, encode and publish streams from one streamlined workflow. Using Sorenson compression, and bearing in mind that most people have only dial-up connections, Uhry chose clips that would last about a minute or less, which would require about 2 or 3 megabytes. With a dial-up connection, downloading the clips would require five or six minutes, while a faster broadband connection allows virtually seamless acquisition.

In mounting his site, Uhry simply used the Webspace that came free with his DSL subscription. Various types of free hosting services exist, but if you have a large media file (such as a feature), you will definitely need a hosting service to stream the content; that can cost anywhere from $10 to $1,000, depending on the services and potential streams.

In terms of shooting specifically for the Web, Uhry feels that compression is the most important factors for cinematographers to bear in mind. With compression, it's best to use a stationary camera, very plain backgrounds, and "even" lighting. Of course, many cinematographers will find these restrictions creatively limiting. "It's okay if you're trying to do something that's strictly information-based, but if you're trying to make something entertaining, you sort of have to drop those guidelines," Uhry says. "Still, it's definitely good to keep in mind what compresses most easily; for example, handheld camera footage does not compress very well."

Putting his reel online has been a great help to Uhry's career in terms of speed and convenience. "I found that having pieces of my reel on the Web has been great when I'm on the phone with a director I've never met," he says. "While we're talking, I can simply direct that person to my Web site to pull up a clip so he or she can see what my work is about."

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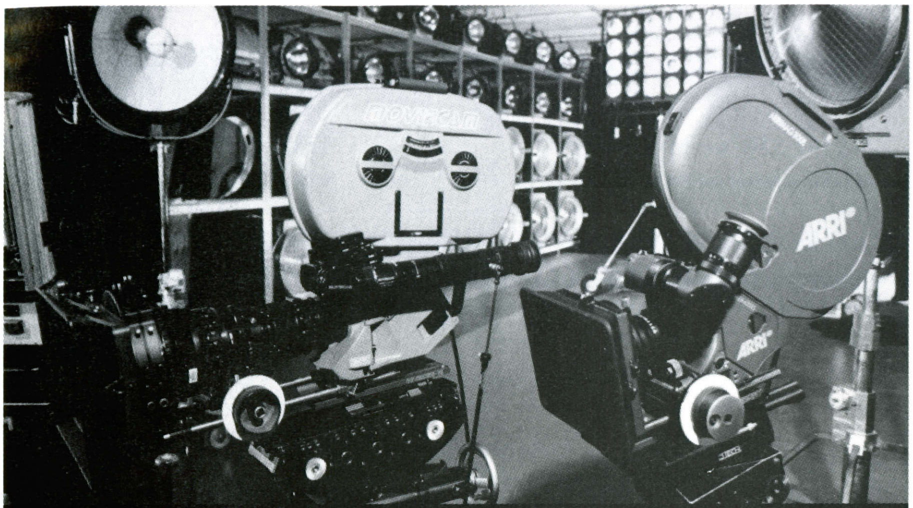
The Web site also makes the process of making and sending out VHS tapes much easier. “Some jobs don’t necessarily merit sending out a tape,” Uhry notes. “It might be a situation where the director or producer is in New York or overseas and has to see something that day.” Although Uhry admits that a VHS tape is better in terms of quality, he believes that his Web site gives people an easy place to start.

Although times are presently hard, the film industry is optimistic about the future of online entertainment and confident that the profits will eventually come. As the tech side of the economy corrects itself, everyone involved in the Internet has sobered up and realized that they can’t build a business simply by advertising and selling banners. Nibblebox’s Bartis believes that everyone is learning from the examples of DEN and Pop.com. “It’s tough right now,” he concedes. “I think we all believe that entertainment content will be delivered online, but whether you can make money with that as your sole business has yet to be seen.”

Eveo’s Zitoun believes that the technology still has limitations, particularly in light of the fact that computer users still don’t have a TV-like experience while watching content on the Web. He predicts that streaming video and the distribution of content will go beyond the PC to include wireless devices, PDAs, set-top boxes such as Tivo, and new kinds of appliances that have yet to be developed. Zitoun also predicts major changes in copyright law due to cases like the Napster court battle. “I will not be surprised to see two models of copyright: one section of copyrighted content and one section of everything else,” he offers.

On an individual basis, however, content creators are optimistic. The filmmakers behind *Sunday’s Game* agree with the assumption that the Web will be a future farm club or nursery for excit-



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ing new filmmakers. At present, notes Garrett, "there's the studio system, [which is] inflexible to new talents, but there's also the film-festival trap, [in which] only a few people decide what the audience is going to see. With the Web, it's definitely up to the individual."

In terms of cinematic images, Uhry is excited about the arrival of more broadband in American homes. "As people have faster and faster data streams into their houses, it makes it a lot easier to up the quality from a QuickTime movie to a DVD," he says. "As far as NTSC is concerned, you can kind of kiss videotapes good-bye."

In Michael Powell's classic 1960 thriller *Peeping Tom,* actress Maxine Audley scolds Karl Boehm with the line, "All this filming isn't healthy!" That phrase may be an appropriate metaphor for the current state of independent filmmaking in America. Whether or not the Internet will be savior of film exhibition and distribution remains to be seen, but it's virtually certain that independent film production will skyrocket. Given the thousands of films being made each year, most will never be viewed on an actual theater screen. In some cases, that may be a good thing, although the current ratio of good films to bad might still apply.

On the positive side, however, the Internet and new digital technology will definitely allow creative people the opportunity to make films that normally wouldn't have a chance. In the 1991 documentary *Hearts of Darkness: A Filmmaker's Apocalypse,* director Francis Ford Coppola muses, "One day, some little fat girl in Ohio is going to be the new Mozart and make a beautiful film with her father's camera, and for once this so-called professionalism about movies will be destroyed forever, and it will become an art form." ■

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Low Anxiety

The Reel Deal

For cinematographers, the complex task of assembling an effective demo reel is frequently a source of both elation and despair. *AC* finds out why.

by Christopher Probst

Inseparable from the art of cinematography is the cinematographer's need to present his work in an engaging, provocative and succinct manner. As any director of photography — young or old, worldwide — will attest, the singular dilemma of how to create an all-encompassing document of one's skills is a rite of passage that each must grapple with as his or her career progresses. Naturally, this presentation is most important at the beginning of one's career, when a name is judged entirely by a 1/2" VHS or 3/4"+6 calling card: the demo reel.

The role a cinematographer's demo reel plays throughout his career varies widely. Early on, a reel must represent who you are and what you're capable of doing, to people completely unfamiliar with you and your work. For more established cinematographers, a reel can be a mere formality, or even a non-issue; experienced cinematographers are often hired because of their impressive bodies of work or long-standing professional relationships. For most directors of photography, however, such a situation is the exception and not the rule.

Agents, directors and producers agree that a demo reel should not only showcase a cinematographer's best work, but should also be created with one major consideration: that it's a sales tool. "I see a lot of cinematographer's reels, and it absolutely boggles my mind that someone wouldn't spend every minute and every dime he has on his reel," states Devin Mann, a representative of commercial and music-video cinematographers at Innovative Artists Agency. "I get about 10 submissions a week, and I immediately look at all of them because I don't want to miss a possible gem. What I usually find is that although most cinematographers spend a lot of time working on their craft, many forget how to *present* their craft. You can be a brilliant cinematographer, but if you have a lousy reel you're not going to get the job."

"It doesn't matter what font you use on your resumé, or even whether an agency's name is on it," Mann continues. "Getting hired for a job has everything to do with what's on that tape. I suggest that cinematographers use sound designers, Flame or Henry work, and even recut and retransfer commercials if they don't like what the agencies did. This business is very competitive, and it's incredibly difficult to separate yourself from the pack."

Opinions vary on how to do that. According to Judy Marks, who has her own self-titled agency, a demo reel should somehow reflect the direction a cinematographer hopes to pursue. "You can say that a reel is about composition or lighting or camera movement, but the bottom line for a director of photography is that a reel has to reflect where you are coming from [and] the kind of work you want to do," she asserts. "It's a very simple idea, but it's key: a reel is a reflection of what's important to you. If you try to please everybody, you're going to end up not doing a good job and not being very happy doing it."

Stacy Cheriff, a former partner of Marks's who now runs her own self-titled boutique agency for cinematographers, notes that many of the people who view reels — particularly with commercials or music videos in mind — are often looking for something specific. "They want to see what they're looking for. They may be looking for green midgets with blue hair, and if you have green midgets with blue hair on your reel, you'll be selected. Unfortunately, what they're looking for changes every minute. And what they say they want and what they eventually pick can often be completely different things! So your reel is absolutely crucial. In the absence of having an advocate for you present, you're being judged solely on that [factor]; your reel truly stands alone and speaks alone."

"When I get a reel, I look at things differently than a director does," submits Gregg Dallesandro of Montana Artists Agency. "I almost like to see something that's more historical for a cinematographer, [something that shows where he or she is coming from]. Ultimately, however, only the best of the best work should go on a reel."

Aaron Schneider, ASC built his career on his commercial/music-video reel in the early Nineties. "My philosophy has always been that [cinematographers] concentrate too heavily on what they think people want to see [on their reels]," he says. "A demo reel is more about presenting the best of your abilities. This is especially important when you're just starting out, because you don't often have the type of work and the variety of resources to design a reel for a specific audience. Seasoned commercial cameramen can design one reel for food, another for stylish visuals, and another for comedy, but when you're just starting out, creating a reel is much more about presenting what you *do* have in a way that will communicate what you can do. The trick is, how do you do that?"

"Don't chase the marketplace. Go with your own vision," advises Allen Daviau, ASC, who often alternates feature-film jobs with commercials and music videos. "If you chase the marketplace and try to get this current look or that current technique, it will all be out of date by the time you get your reel out. You're better off trying to present something that coherently represents your own vision and the kind of work you'd like to do. It may not work, but at least you'll be going from your own passion and not second-guessing what people want to see."

Doing the homework

Because a reel is often the sole representation of one's ability as a cinematographer, it behooves any aspiring director of photography to do as much research as possible into the marketplace he or she will be "selling." Sadly, this often is not the case. "I can't tell you how many people come in to see me — and this is a big mistake — with a big carton full of tapes," says Marks. "They'll show me stuff with time code and uncorrected footage, assuming that I'm going to give them free input and tell them what they should put on their *real* reels. Sometimes I do, but they're assuming they will have another chance to show me the reel once it's put together, and I don't have time to see everybody twice. One should have his act together when he goes to see an agent. You really only get one shot and you might as well just impress the heck out of the person you're showing your work to."

> **"What I usually find is that although most cinematographers spend a lot of time working on their craft, many forget how to present their craft. You can be a brilliant cinematographer, but if you have a lousy reel you're not going to get the job."**
>
> **— Devin Mann, agent**

Being prepared also extends to considering the material that is included on the reel. "There are several common mistakes that I see over and over again," relates Cheriff. "[For one,] a reel should not be too long — it should be as long as you can keep someone's interest, and that does not mean your *own* interest! You can watch your reel a thousand times and never get bored with it, but other people will. If you have 10 pieces of material, give them grades of A, B, C or D, then put only your A material on [the reel]. If something's a B, don't use it. The weakest link brings the quality of your entire reel down, and believe me, they *will* remember the weak link.

"Also, [before] you send or show a reel to somebody, get on the phone and do some research," she adds. "If you're sending a reel to someone who's commercial- and music video-oriented, focus your reel that way. [You should] have more than one reel. Don't take a theatrical reel with a bunch of short films that you've done — no matter how may awards they've won — and place them [on your reel] in their entirety and expect an agent or commercial company to sit through it. They don't like that."

"Seeing" your work

How to select the "best of the best" often presents a bit of a quandary for many directors of photography. It is difficult to be objective about one's work, and it's also easy to fall in love with material for the wrong reasons. For example, beginning cinematographers might include a piece because they know how hard a particular shot was to achieve, even though the work isn't necessarily that significant. Ross Richardson, a young cinematographer who recently signed at Innovative Artists, recalls, "I showed an early reel to a producer and asked what she thought. She told me it was good, and I said, "Look at this technically, though.' She said, 'Technically? I'm a producer, I don't care about the technical stuff. I just want to see pretty images.' It was then that I realized it's not about what's technically the best. What's exciting to us as cameramen is not necessarily exciting to the people hiring us."

Schneider concurs, noting, "You hear stories about the opening of someone's reel, and it's a shot of a girl getting on a bus and the doors closing. Your reaction is, 'What was that about?' They then tell you, 'It was daytime shot that we did at night! Didn't it look like daytime?' A reel is as much about developing an ability to see yourself — to see your own work from a critical point of view — as it is a representation of your work. People talk about being your own worst critic, and that's what you have to become. But that only develops over time, as you progress as a cinematographer. You can't give someone an aesthetic — it's common sense, and you can't teach that to someone who's just starting out. He has to learn it for himself.

"One interesting thing that used to happen to me," he continues, "was that I would put a reel together and take it to an interview. Invariably, there would always be one spot or a little piece that would start to make me cringe. As soon as you show your work to somebody in a important or meaningful scenario, you suddenly have a totally different view of your reel. [I recommend that you] put together an offline, sit down with friends and test the reel."

Dallesandro says what gets him interested in a reel is the work itself. "Ultimately, what I want to see is the best work, and that's it. Don't put something on just to put it on, saying, 'I don't have any great nighttime exteriors, so I put this on.' If your nighttime exterior work is absolutely amazing and as good as everything else on your reel, put it on. Diversity is great if everything is slammin'."

What to include?

Just as every individual is different, so is every demo reel. However, by knowing the marketplace you're targeting — be it the commercial/music-video arena, independent features or documentaries — you can apply some general rules of thumb.

The question of whether to use a montage of images on a reel garnered the most polarized responses. Love them or hate them, montages are often the only resort for beginning cinematographers with varied material — typically, low-budget films and videos, student projects and spec work. "When I first started out, [my reel] had a lot of student-film footage and little side projects," recalls Schneider. "Most professional demo reels by commercial and video cinematographers have excerpts of music videos and whole commercials, while those of feature cameramen have long-form montages and trailers for feature cameramen. Often, however, a person just starting out has a mix of everything. It's also about prestige. Sometimes early on, if you're doing low-budget work, it's best to mix that work into a montage to conceal the low-budget nature of the project."

> **"A reel is as much about developing an ability to see yourself as it is a representation of your work. People talk about being your own worst critic, and that's what you have to become."**
>
> **— Aaron Schneider, ASC**

Mann expands, "The real trick to creating a good reel is maximizing the impact of your work. Let's say you have five videos you're proud of that you want to put on your reel. At your present stage, the work may not have a lot of production design, and no one will know who the artists are anyway, so I suggest that you focus on the imagery of those pieces and forget about the audio that originally accompanied them. I'd search for audio — something that's kind of mysterious, like William Burroughs's spoken-word [performances] — that, when combined with this imagery, creates something different and has a sense of the unknown. Frankly, it doesn't really matter what the imagery is, and it doesn't really matter what the audio is — it just needs to work. And it needs to be your own fingerprint, whether it's a clock ticking and slow-motion images of a girl running through the fields, or the sound of dripping water as you fade up on a night exterior and you [can't really see] who's lurking in the shadows. Because agents specialize in looking at a lot of reels, we are constantly looking for something that will separate a particular director of photography from the pack."

On the flip side, many in the industry dislike the use of montages and feel they are too often used to hide the fact that complete work can't be shown on its own. "I loathe montages," proclaims Cheriff. "People want to see spots in their entirety [because] it's a rhythm they're familiar with. A montage just makes you say, 'Well, that's a pretty image,' but it's almost like stills. It's not motion; it's not a coherent, cohesive piece.

"If you really *have* to do a montage," she offers, "I suggest you put it at the end of the reel or, if it has a particular theme, in the middle of the reel. [One of my clients] had a beauty montage [within his reel], and it worked because it was beautifully edited and was not trying to serve as his entire reel. Also, if someone wants to do a 30-second power

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montage before his name comes up, I'll humor that, because that's his way of getting shots that didn't make it somewhere else. But anything more than that, and people's eyes will cross."

The question of "to montage, or not to montage" becomes more complicated when one is highlighting work from music videos. Richardson relates, "When Devin [Mann] and I watched my old reel, we discussed which parts of each video were the most interesting visually. Sometimes re-cutting a video is necessary to ensure that the most interesting shots are included in the 30- to 40-second clip you put on your reel. You have to put your best material on your reel, but often what may be best for the overall piece may not be the best for you photographically."

This is often true of commercials as well. In the advertising world, a spot's edit is often determined by a committee of creatives at an ad agency; the director seldom has the final word. Sometimes, in fact, directors aren't asked for a cut at all. In such instances, it's common for directors to make their own cuts of the spots for their demo reels. "And nine times out of 10, the director's cut is better," states Schneider. "So [cinematographers] often put the director's cut on their reels as well. It's pretty well-known within the industry that if you see a spot on a reel that's cut differently and has different music but has the same footage you saw on TV, it's a director's cut."

Structuring a Reel

The pacing and order of a reel are of paramount importance. Cheriff notes, "I used to say there were different ways of balancing reels — like start strong and end strong, then put other pieces in the middle to balance it — but in recent years people [have begun to] watch reels on fast-forward. They're either looking for something specific, or they're looking to be dazzled. So put your best work up front and grab them in the first 30 seconds. If you don't, they've already popped your reel out and moved on to something else. I wouldn't even say 'end strong' anymore; stack it, and use your powerful material up front."

According to Marks, the way in which demo reels are judged has been significantly affected by changes in the industry: ad agencies are now approving cinematographers as well as directors. "That means [your reel] is no longer [judged solely on] the photography," she says. "On some level, the concept bleeds into it, and that has changed everything. Many commercial directors now come from ad agencies, and when they're looking at reels, it's not only about the cinematography, it's also about the concept of the spot."

Cheriff agrees, "Good advertising works — it sells the whole package, the director and the cinematographer. That's a primary factor I deal with every day. The director of photography obviously didn't write the spot, but a strong spot really makes a difference. If you have two spots and they're equal photographically but one is conceptually better, always [choose] the piece that's conceptually strong [for your reel]. As a cinematographer, you'd like to think people are just looking at the visuals, but they're not."

The size of a production's budget doesn't necessarily matter, Dallesandro adds. "It doesn't have to be a $4 million Nike spot. If it's a cool little Diesel jeans ad that's kind of off-the-wall, that counts just as well. Some of the best spots I saw at the AICP [Association of Independent Commercial Producers] show last year were the specs, and some of the best were the ones that cost a couple hundred bucks.

"Comedy works well, too," he continues. "I've had guys get hired off the creative of a good campaign. It might have been a handheld 16mm comedy spot, but because the director thought the spot was funny he hired the cameraman."

Specs

Invaluable to any cinematographer trying to break into another marketplace is the technique of shooting "spec" projects — commercials, music videos or short films financed out of the filmmakers' own pocketbooks. "Although I got my start in commercials with spec spots," says Schneider, "I continued to shoot them all the way into my mid-career for free, and I would still consider it. I'm always looking to create something that's good and that will expand my work in a different way. Even if you get a paid commercial, it's not always a cool spot — [it might be] a Denny's spot with a guy sitting and eating. We all know that the kind of commercial work that gets attention and that people love to do are the really pictorial, unique-looking graphic ads, but that's very hard work to get. So even when you do get started and are working, you should look for the young directors who are trying to break in, because they usually try to break in with very cinematic work. Nobody breaks into commercials as a director by doing beer pours.

"Also, when you're first starting out, making sure that the free work you do is assembled in a professional manner is a feat," he warns. "If someone doesn't understand that even a spec spot has to get color-corrected in a telecine onto Digital Betacam, get edited and then be onlined, it's not going to look like a good spot. Part of the battle becomes making sure that the spec spots go through the same steps that real spots go through. That way, [in terms of] quality, the perception of the spot is that it's real.

"When I started doing spec spots, a lot of commercials were just starting to incorporate dynamically moving graphics with interesting type; you couldn't just cut 10 shots together and then cut to a product

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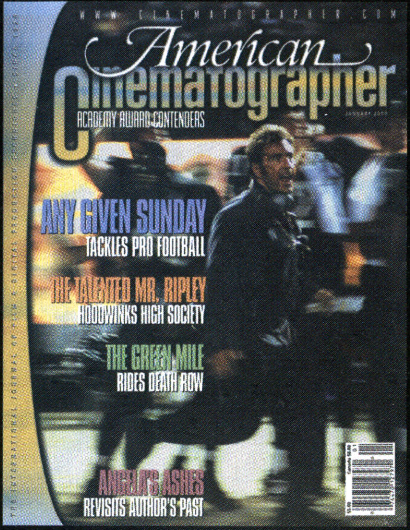
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Cinematographers are typically responsible for assembling their own show reel in a concise, engaging and clean manner. With agency rosters typically numbering in the double digits, few reps will be willing to cough up thousands of dollars to produce one of their client's demo reels. It is therefore incumbent upon a director of photography to devise not only the artistic style of his or her reel, but also to provide the necessary financing.

In editing a reel, one of the most important considerations is how to physically cut one's work. In most legitimate video-finish productions, the editing process typically entails creating a cut on an Avid system (or one of the competing high-end editing systems) at low resolution — a cut commonly referred to as an offline edit. The project is then onlined via the editing system itself (if it supports higher-resolution mastering) or transferred — via a floppy disc with an Edit Decision List (EDL) file — to a higher-end online system. Again, one has various options in terms of both linear and non-linear online technology; the most common system currently in use is Quantel's Henry, which is owned by most local post houses.

Unfortunately, Avid and Henry bays equipped with the necessary hardware and operators are not cheap by any means. Additionally, if you're dealing with several years of your footage, a significant amount of storage space and several different tape-deck formats are often required to sort through and digitize the material that's being condensed onto the reel.

Given the rapid advances of the home-computer and consumer-video industries, however, many resourceful and budget-conscious cinematographers have begun assembling their own home-editing suites. In recent years, several companies have released, and continued to refine, consumer-grade non-linear editing software packages for both PC (IBM-based) and Macintosh computer systems. The two most prevalent editing systems are Adobe's Premiere (for both Windows and Mac operating systems) and Apple's Final Cut Pro (for Macs). Other popular consumer-grade editing programs include Pinnacle Systems' DV Studio, in:sync's Speed Razor DV and Digital Origin's EditDV.

Setting aside the usual "Mac versus PC" arguments, all of these software programs offer features similar to those of their professional-grade non-linear cousins, including time-code input/output to controlled decks, edit time-lines, multi-window and multi-monitor displays, and various motion effects, including fades, dissolves, wipes, freeze-frames and slow/fast-motion manipulation.

With the advent of various DV cameras and decks equipped with IEEE 1394 (also known as Firewire or i.Link) inputs/outputs, anyone with a home-editing station with a similar IEEE 1394 video-capture interface card can digitize footage, edit it and then output a cut piece with effects and music of broadcast quality.

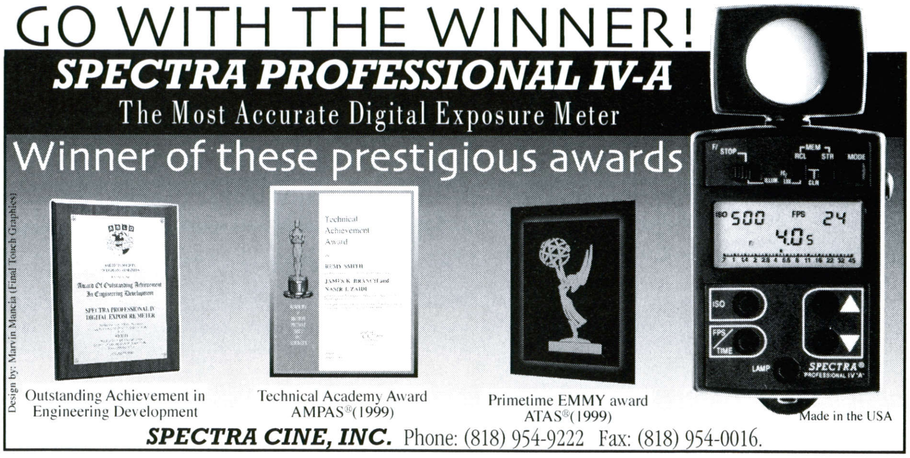
"I have a Final Cut Pro system at home," says cinematographer Ross Richardson, who has now cut several generations of his reel at home in the DV domain. "Initially, I took my first edit, which I had done on an Avid, and transferred that from Digital Beta to DV. I then could easily cut my reel myself — building on what I had originally done on the Avid by rearranging or changing certain parts and adding my latest work. With the Avid, I had to online my first reel, and I wound up spending about $2,000 on it. That's not including getting dubs to 3/4" [tape], which cost another $400. By editing at home in DV, I can now compile all of my footage to DV and cut my reel myself. Also, my last reel was output straight from my computer with no need for an online. I created all of the edits, titles, fades and sound cues and then output everything straight to DV. From that DV master, I can get all of my dubs made [including a new DigiBeta master and subsequent 3/4" and VHS viewing copies.]"

The DV format offers more than 500 lines of resolution for NTSC video — significantly higher than the 250 lines of resolution offered by standard VHS or the 400 of Hi-8. Additionally, when digital footage is used in conjunction with a Firewire port on the computer and a non-compressing video capture card, it can effectively remain as first-generation digital code through input, editing and final output to the DV camera or deck. Also, DV's audio recording utilizes PCM (pulse code modulation) — the same process used for recording compact discs — and features more than 96 decibels of dynamic range.

An added advantage of editing on a home-based computer platform is the ability to exploit emerging display markets, such as the Internet and CD-ROM/DVDs. Once you've edited your reel as a file on your desktop, you can easily compress the file (using a program such as Terran's Cleaner 5, which enables the capture, authoring and encoding of high-quality media in several formats, including QuickTime, RealSystem and MPEG-1 and -2) and post it to a Web page or burn it onto a CD-ROM. Additionally, Terran has also just released EditDVD, which, according to product manager Charles Wiltgen, allows one to encode media to a "cDVD." In short, this process entails burning an MPEG-2 file onto a CDR disc in a standard, recordable CD drive on your computer. The resulting cDVD will be compatible with virtually all DVD players, but due to the CDR's 650MB of data space, it will only hold approximately 10-15 minutes of media (depending upon the compression used and the data rate at which the cDVD is burned).

It should also be noted that all of these programs can be used in conjunction with each other or with additional desktop publishing and media tools, such as Adobe's After Effects and Photoshop, to create a dramatic package with sophisticated titles, menus and graphics. (For more information on this topic, see "The Desktop Cinematographer" in *AC* April '97). As these hardware and software solutions become increasingly affordable, the home-editing solution will become even more viable.

— Christopher Probst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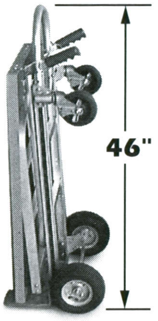
shot," he continues. "People were incorporating graphics into the spot and doing interesting post effects. As a result, you [find yourself] trying to emulate things that are more and more expensive to emulate. Meanwhile, all you're trying to do is get a job! But that's part of the game."

Cheriff says she's signed several cinematographers whose reels exclusively featured spec commercials. "If spec material is really good, people won't know it's a spec. Over the years, I've worked with cinematographers who had primarily spec spots, and it worked out fine. There are many talented, young cameramen out there, but the reality is that their reel will sell them. Spec work can be fabulous for that — if it's good."

In terms of drumming up spec work, Marks advises, "I tell people to take a charity they're interested in — whether it's Heal the Bay, the American Cancer Society or Big Brothers, Big Sisters — then talk to friends who are writers or art directors at ad agencies. Have everybody sit down and write a 30-second spot. Invest a little money, take it as a tax write-off, then pull in your neighbors and just do it. Make it a community project, create good karma and get something for your reel at the same time. There are hundreds of organizations in Los Angeles, New York and Chicago that would jump at the chance to create a PSA that helps their cause.

"I'm sure the L.A. Conservancy would love someone to come and shoot their gorgeous buildings," she continues. "Borrow a 16mm camera — you don't even need sync sound — and do an amazing architectural spot with available light. Make it all about the composition and the camera movement. It takes a little bit of thought, but I would respond to something like that on someone's reel. And it's much easier to call Otto Nemenz and say, 'Hi, I'm doing a spot for Big Brothers, Big



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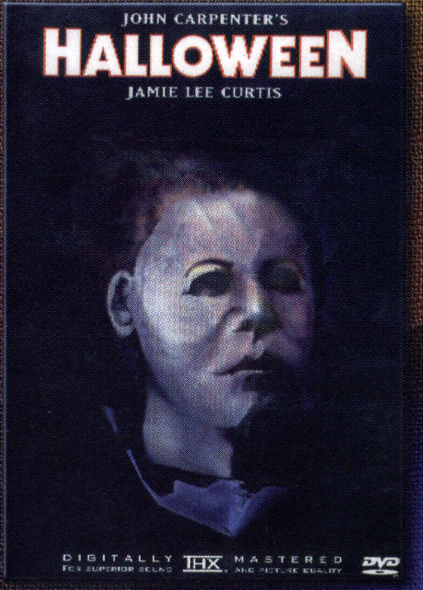
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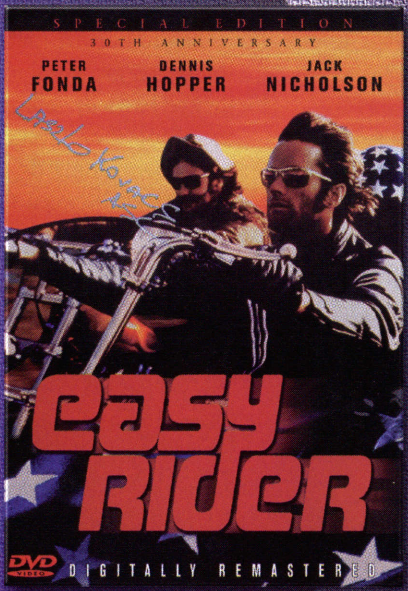
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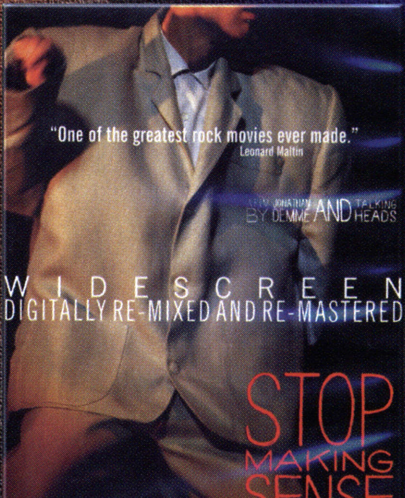
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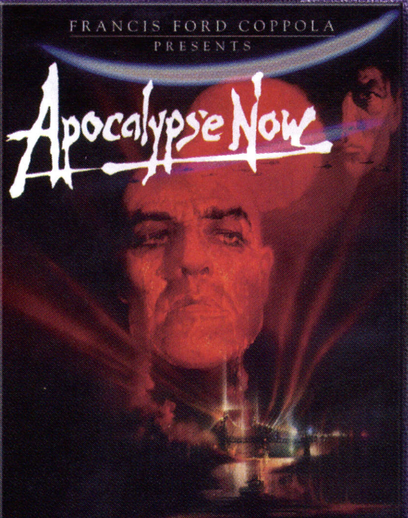
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Brothers, Big Sisters,' instead of, 'I'm doing something for my reel.'"

Getting an Agent

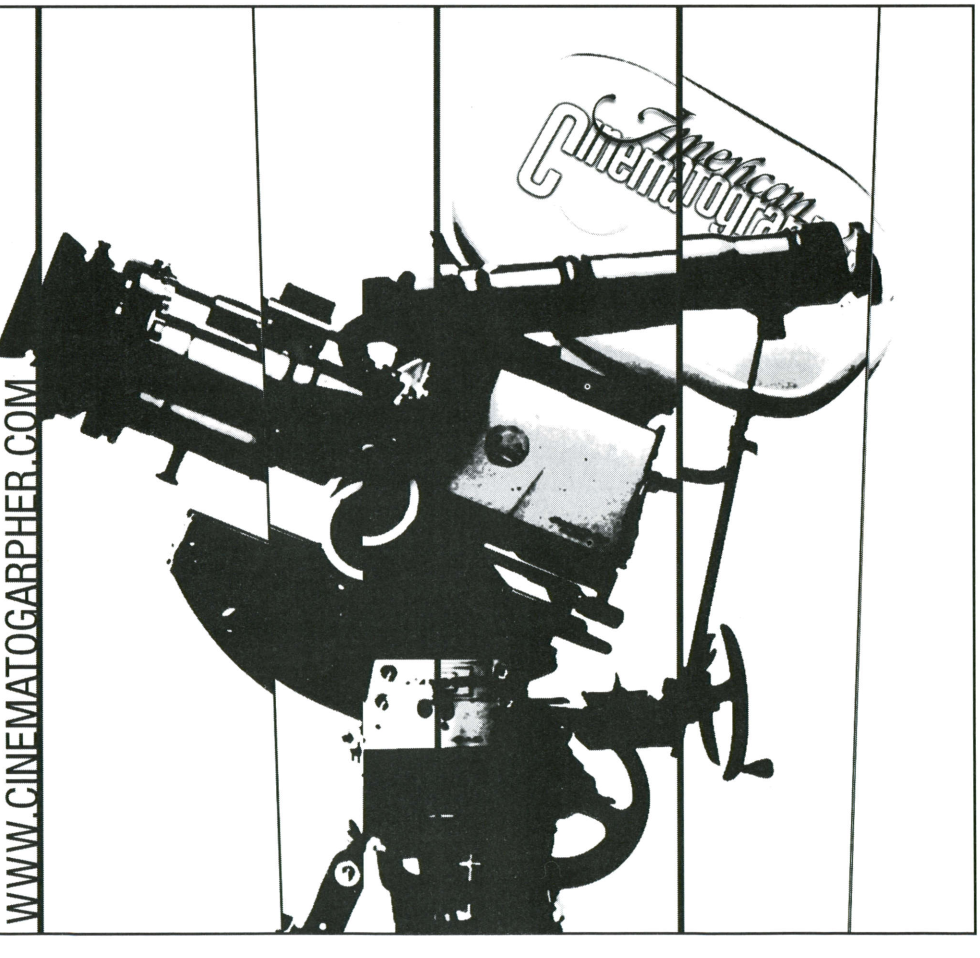
At this point, you've edited the reel together, using only your best work and structuring the reel to hold the viewer's attention. Now what? Equally as important as all of these steps is the manner in which you approach prospective agents, directors and producers with your reel.

"Relying on an agent to make your career is a big mistake," states Schneider. "When they look at your work, [all you can do is hope that] they will see some potential and be willing to nurture that. An agent has the talent for shopping your work; they're basically selling your reel to the people they know.

"Unfortunately, there is often a discrepancy between the agent's and a new director of photography's expectations," he continues. "When I started out, I assumed all I needed was an agent to make my career, but I've learned that only time and hard work can build a career."

The agents themselves maintain that a cinematographer's personality can be as important as great reel. Marks notes that although a demo reel is a powerful sales tool, a potential client's bearing during an initial meeting with her is just as important. "If you don't like a person in the initial interview, if there's something that totally bugs you about him or her, it's going to stay there," she admits. "[In fact,] it's going to get worse. I had a director of photography sit on a couch and talk *at* me for an hour and a half, and he would not let me get a word in. I finally said, 'Even if you have the greatest reel on the planet, I would not sign you. I am sitting here listening to you; you have not asked me one question; you have talked about yourself non-stop and you're even disputing every point I try to make. You are impossible!' He was shocked, but I can't be the only [agent] who thinks this way."

Dallesandro agrees wholeheartedly. "Even if I'm passionate about someone's work, I also have to be passionate about the person. I've had guys who have sent in [great] reels, but then the person comes in and it's like talking to a brick. I don't feel comfortable with that. Most agents will tell you it's a business, [that] we sign people because we think we're going to make money off of them. That's true, but I would also like to have a relationship with somebody I respect. If it's somebody with whom I would not spend any time, I would not send him to your set for 12 to 18 hours.



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"I always encourage cinematographers to meet every agent they can," he continues. "Don't sign with anyone until you meet at least three or four other people. I wouldn't want someone to regret his decision three or four months down the road. You should be sure you're with the right person before committing to that relationship."

Marks offers some additional key advice to cinematographers in search of agents: "Find out what *they* pay for. Find out how much commission they take — there are a few who take more than 10 percent. Some agents will charge you for shipping, and some will charge for long-distance phone calls. Of course, all agents will make you pay for your own reels or DVDs."

The State of the Industry

The marketplace for cinematographers is getting more and more competitive, and the need to create a unique identity is critical. Creating several reels that focus on different kinds of photography is a key component of navigating these turbulent waters. A prominent commercial cinematographer who declined to be identified states, "For years, I thought the best thing I could have on my reel for commercials was a really wide range of examples showing that I could do anything — car commercials, food commercials, large things, small things. I'm sure it was the most massive failure of a reel ever. That's not what agency people want to see. You're much better off taking something you like to do and building your whole reel around that. If that happens to be mirrors kicking sunlight through windows in rooms filled with smoke, give them eight spots of that and you'll work from it — but when that look goes out of vogue, you'd better find something else.

"Agencies are looking for something that emphasizes a certain style," he continues. "That's why [tailoring a reel] can be frustrating to cinematographers: we like to show we can do anything."

Marks agrees, "Commercial people are guilty of wanting to see on a reel what they're planning to shoot. We have a joke in this office about a food reel I had a submitted for a job: the reel had chicken-breast shots on it, but the [agency wanted] to see chicken legs! The way we've gotten around that is to do a general reel of someone's best work — usually in one vein — and then have a tabletop reel and a car reel as well. So if the cinematographer gets the job and the [producers] want to make sure he can shoot cars, I have a car reel as well."

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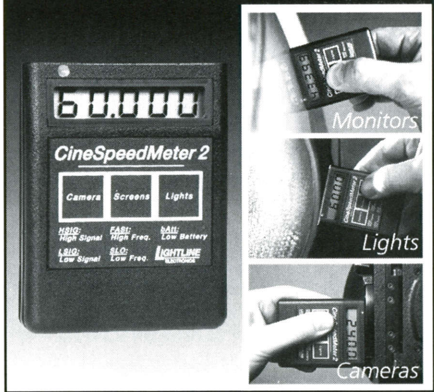

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Daviau recalls, "A person from a production company called me and asked, 'Do you have a spot that has a couple walking through the woods talking at sunset with a camera dollying through the trees with them?' I told him I had a spot with a red-headed girl walking through the woods at sunset with a camera dollying through the trees with her as she talked to camera. He paused, then said, 'Not a couple, though?' You will run into things that absurd. Sometimes people are looking for something so exact that it's impossible to [plan for it in advance]."

Schneider argues that ultimately, catering one's reel to the marketplace may not best serve a cinematographer's goals. "I could put together a reel that would probably get me tons more work, but it would be the kind of mainstream work that only pays our bills," he says. "I could put that reel together and end up shooting Cornflakes to my heart's content. But you have to temper the kind of work you want to do with your sanity. A reel is not so much a sales tool, but more about showing people the kind of cinematographer you are. When I put reels together, I always think, 'If I were showing this to a filmmaker or a fellow cinematographer, what would I be most proud to show?' You have to decide whether you're targeting where you want to go with your career, or whether you're just plain looking for work.

"I liken a career to being in a canoe in the rapids with a paddle," Schneider concludes. "The river is going to take you where you're going to go — you don't have control over the current — but you do have a paddle and you can kind of steer yourself. The frustration comes when you try to engineer your path. As you get older and more experienced, you realize that the path defines itself. You just have to stay in the game." ■

Short Takes

Holiday Hijinks and a Lyrical Legend

Christmas Grifter

by Stephanie Argy

The short film *Merry Christmas* tells the story of an elevator operator and how he manipulates the tenants in the building where he works, gaining their sympathy — and many presents — on Christmas Eve. "I like screwball, and I like noir, so I wanted to make a screwball noir," says director Paul Marashlian. The film is based on a John Cheever short story, *Christmas is a Sad Season for the Poor*, which Marashlian says had always seemed very cinematic to him. "I mentioned the story to a friend who's a producer, David Cunningham, and he said [he'd help] get some money together." Ultimately, the 15-minute film was finished for less than $20,000, with financing coming from credit cards and family members.

Merry Christmas was Marashlian's first film, and Cunningham told him he knew just the people to help him through the process. One was cinematographer Jason Zimmerman. The Utah-based Zimmerman did most of his preproduction work with the director by telephone. Marashlian also sent Zimmerman rough storyboards, as well as photographs of possible locations. The film's main location was the Bryson Building, a residential hotel in downtown Los Angeles. The building has previously appeared in such movies as *The Grifters* and *Barfly*, but Marashlian discovered it by chance as he was driving around in the area.

The director's goal was to create a timeless look for the film, rather than tying it to a specific era. He originally wanted to shoot in black-and-white, but Zimmerman argued against it. "I told him I thought that was wrong," says Zimmerman. "He had sent me stills of the interior of the Bryson Hotel. I could see all of the marvelous old-time work, all of the detail in this fabulous, old place. Black-and-white wouldn't have done it justice." Instead, Zimmerman envisioned a rich, yellow look for the movie. "I wanted a Darius Khondji [ASC, AFC] style of yellow. I had to teach Paulie what *yellow* was to me."

Zimmerman arrived in Los Angeles just two days before the start of the shoot, and he and Marashlian worked out the final details. To help Zimmerman envision the movie the way he did, Marashlian showed him two clips: the ballroom sequence from *The Magnificent Ambersons* (photographed by Stanley Cortez, ASC), which features silhouettes and pools of light; and the beginning of *Interiors* (shot by Gordon Willis, ASC), which has a spareness he hoped to recapture for a scene set in a flophouse.

A short film about a manipulative elevator operator, *Merry Christmas* was shot primarily at the Bryson Building in downtown Los Angeles. Cinematographer Jason Zimmerman (at left) says the hotel's gilded elevator was a tight squeeze, but provided some interesting visuals.

Photos courtesy of Paul Marashlian.

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To photograph conversations in the elevator's close quarters, Zimmerman and director Paul Marashlian decided to use the elevator's mirrors rather than employing the traditional shot/reverse shot method.

Zimmerman photographed *Merry Christmas* on Kodak EXR 5298, using short-ends and recans. Through connections with Otto Nemenz in Salt Lake City, he worked out a deal on an Arriflex BL-3 from the company's L.A. branch. "We wanted the smallest, cheapest package we could get," the cameraman says. The package included a set of standard-speed primes, ranging from 16mm to 100mm (though Zimmerman stayed mainly in the 24-85mm range). For a humorous jump-cut sequence, he went as wide as a 9.8mm Kinoptic, and in one shot featuring a woman emerging from darkness, he used the 100mm.

Zimmerman made heavy use of Soft/FX filters on the production. "I shot almost the whole film with a ½ Soft/FX," he says. "I used a 1 for close-ups, usually on the women, too. I've never liked ProMist filters; I think they affect the entire image, [whereas] Soft/FX filters only affect the highlights."

Zimmerman also employed Tiffen's LLD filter. "It's intended to give you an 85 correction after the sun goes down, and you don't lose any stop with it," he says. "It gives skin tones a little warmth, and I used it to warm everything up a bit. I might have used tobacco filters or corals, but there was no budget."

To save money, the production didn't have a video tap, either, but Marashlian says he didn't miss it. "I like to be right in the middle of the mix," he says. Zimmerman notes, "Paulie had very definite ideas about the way he [wanted] things composed. He was really nervous about getting too tight for the big screen. [He'd ask,] 'How tight is your close-up?'; 'Are you chopping their heads off?'; 'Are you just above their chins?'" I wasn't nervous about it. I argued for a more intimate look, for using as long a lens as possible. He actually thanked me afterwards."

Some of the movie's most important sequences take place in the Bryson Building's 1919 gilded elevator. The elevator's interior was only 8' x 5 ½', so using a long lens became difficult. "I think a 50mm was as long as we could go," says Zimmerman. The elevator also became quite crowded. "Paul, the sound man, my focus puller, the actors and I were all in there for about 10 hours!"

The elevator had two mirrors, one on each side, which Marashlian and Zimmerman used to make the shots more interesting, especially during a sequence in which Charlie is telling sad Christmas stories to a series of elevator riders. The sequence is shot from behind Charlie, focusing on the reactions of the people listening to him. Because Charlie is visible in the foreground, Marashlian felt he didn't need excessive coverage. "I didn't want to have any reverse shots of

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Charlie," he says. "I tried keeping the camera over his shoulder, so the audience would identify more with him than with the people across from him, before punching in for close-ups."

Marashlian adds that he believes in shooting only what he needs. "Your head becomes like a little Moviola," he says. "I didn't want to shoot any 'maybe' shots." Yet at the same time, he realizes that his decision to work that way might have seemed foolhardy to the crew. In fact, Zimmerman admits that he was nervous about how little coverage Marashlian was getting. "At the time, I thought, 'You're going to be sorry.' But when he sent me the first cut, I said, 'You were right.'"

Ultimately, the crew managed to do about 100 setups in three days. "I wouldn't want to do it that way again, because it was brutal on Jason and the guys," says Marashlian. "But we got the shots." Because the crew was small and largely inexperienced, Zimmerman and first AC Chris Burke doubled as the grip and electrical crew. "We were running around doing everything ourselves," says Zimmerman. Although the situation was grueling, he feels it actually led to a better-looking film. "I think I would have overlit things [if I'd had more time]," he says. "I think it's a natural tendency for younger cinematographers — sometimes you don't trust your eye. When you're in a hurry, nice little accidents happen!"

Zimmerman's choice of lighting was dictated by the physical limitations of the locations. Because he was using available power, he had to be careful about how much strain he put on the aging electrical systems. As a result, he primarily used small tungsten units (although a couple of 1.2K HMIs were used in one scene to create a feeling of moonlight). Because he couldn't afford to lose any stop, he didn't use any filtration on the lights.

Working nights on a borrowed Avid, Marashlian and editor Jay Karas were able to post the movie in 10 months. Fotokem color timer Jimmy "Jam" Williams guided Marashlian and Zimmerman through a few passes at the

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answer print. Ultimately, the film was printed on Kodak's Vision print stock, which produced the velvety blacks the filmmakers wanted.

By creating *Merry Christmas*, Marashlian learned about not only the filmmaking process, but also the realities of the independent film marketplace. He finished his movie in October of 1998, and since then he has seen it rejected by 49 of the 51 festivals to which he submitted it. But the news is not all bleak: the American Cinematheque recently included the film in its "Inspired By" series at Hollywood's venerable Egyptian Theater. "Seeing it in an old-time movie palace made up for the last couple of years," says Marashlian. "A movie becomes a much different thing when you watch it with an audience, and we could feel it."

Marashlian plans to do a low-budget feature soon; he says it will be a genre piece, like the old Corman-AIP pictures, with a strong female lead. "I need to make something that sells itself," he notes wryly, adding that he plans to reteam with Zimmerman on the production. "I'll go to war with him anytime," Marashlian says, noting that Zimmerman even drove the production's grip truck. "Jason is a hands-on filmmaker who works fast and maintains attention to detail. He takes his craft seriously and collaborates well with everyone."

Dreams in the Dust

by Stephanie Argy

Aizea: City of the Wind is a lyrical film about a woman who lives with her young son in an isolated town where outsiders have been feared and hated since the days of foreign conquerors. Even the forces of nature fight against visitors, and local legend says that the conquerors themselves were blown away by the god of the wind. The woman in *Aizea* had fallen in love with an outsider years before, but at their wedding, the same vicious wind that blew away the conquerors rose up and carried him off as well. For years, she has hoped for his return. The film shows what happens when another stranger, who might be her lover, arrives in the town.

Basque director Ione Hernandez made *Aizea* as her master's thesis at Chapman University School of Film and Television in Orange, California. German producer Ralf Weinfurtner helped raise $70,000 in financing from various international sources, including a grant from a Basque filmmaking fund. Hernandez asked cinematographer Daniel Aranyo to shoot the movie for her. From the start, Aranyo was impressed by the director's dedication to her project. "It seemed like it was the only thing in her life that was important," he says, "and that is contagious."

The two also found themselves very much in sync about the tone of the movie, which Aranyo describes as "poetic realism. It's more about impressions than a real depiction [of events]." When he and Hernandez began discussing films that could serve as inspirations, both mentioned the 1973 Spanish film *The Spirit of the Beehive,* directed by Victor Erice.

Because Aranyo is also a skilled painter, he worked with Hernandez to elaborate on her storyboards and fully capture her vision of the entire movie. He and Hernandez also looked at paintings, especially those of Goya, and listened to music as a way to formulate the emotions of the movie. Hernandez wanted the visuals in *Aizea* to be an extension of her central character's emotions. "I wanted the lighting to be part of the inner world of the character," she says. "I wanted the lighting to help me, because there was not that much dialogue."

In the film's flashback scenes, which take place before the young woman's true love is blown away by the wind, she is full of hope and innocence, and the whites and pale blues of her costume reflect her state of mind. "Blue for me [represents] purity, and I wanted her to be the most pure," says Hernandez. To enhance that aura, Aranyo shot the colors to be as sharp as possible by lighting the characters with frontal light and no diffusion, and by enhancing the saturation with a polarizer filter.

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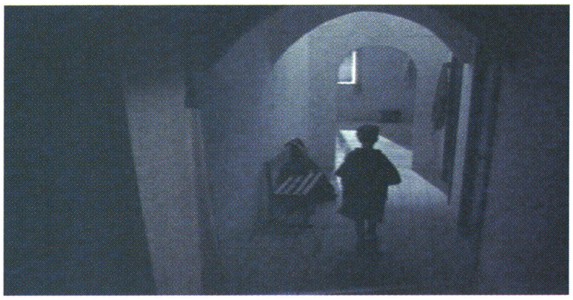


***Aizea: City of the Wind*, a Chapman University master's thesis film directed by Ione Hernandez and photographed by Daniel Aranyo (opposite page), tells the story of a young mother who mourns for a lost love in a small town where outsiders are feared. Citing the 1973 film *The Spirit of the Beehive* as a key inspiration, the filmmakers strove to suggest the film's shifting emotions with light and color rather than dialogue.**

the story's emotional tone becomes more painful. Aranyo tried to create a sense of tragedy by imagining blood mixed into the earlier blue-and-white palette, producing a new set of purple hues.

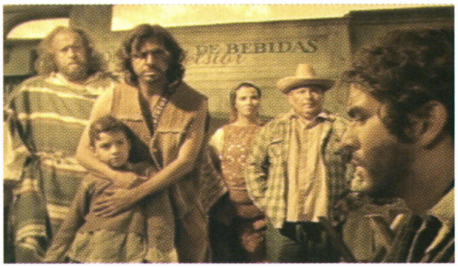
At this point in the film, the woman's house, where she waits with her son, begins to resemble an underwater tomb. Created on a soundstage, the house set was a big space with minimal dressing. "It mirrored the emptiness of her soul," says Aranyo. The walls were painted a dark white, which the cinematographer describes as "a white with no life." To further enhance the tomb-like feeling, Aranyo lit the space with rows of 1Ks, positioned along the walls so that they bounced into a 20' x 20' muslin hung above the set. "It was a super-soft light that felt as if it came from nowhere," he says. Light fell on the walls but was skirted off the center of the room, so that the characters moving within seemed like ghosts in silhouette.

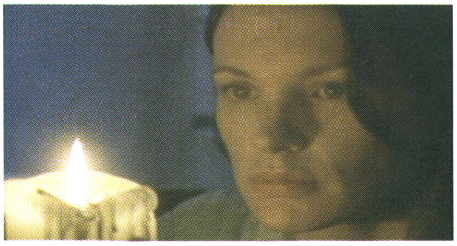
The woman has a strong desire to experience life beyond her small town, a feeling that cuts her off her from the other townspeople. "She's a fish on the dust," says Aranyo. "She belongs to a different medium — water — and she was thrown in the dust." The other characters are completely tied to the ground, and everything about them suggests earth, from their clothes to their makeup to the way in which they were photographed. Aranyo used Tiffen's Antique Suede filter to enhance the dusty feeling of the town and its inhabitants. "It's a little like a chocolate, but without so much red — it's more yellow," he says. "It made everything more monochromatic, like the town's attitude toward life."

In contrast to the townspeople, the woman, her son and the mysterious stranger wear shades of blues, an echo of the light, hopeful colors the woman wore before her lover disappeared. "They are closer to the sky — they dream," Hernandez explains.

Aizea was shot with a crew of almost 90 at locations that included the San Diego Railroad Museum and the Santa Ventura Studio, north of Los Angeles. Santa Ventura offered stages that were used by the production, as well as a Mexican-style town. Nevertheless, production designer Carlos Osorio and art director Nya Patrino had to do a considerable amount of design and construction to create the village Hernandez had envisioned. Within a week, their crew of 26 volunteers built a church, a cantina and the interior of the woman's house.

Aranyo had to be inventive, too;



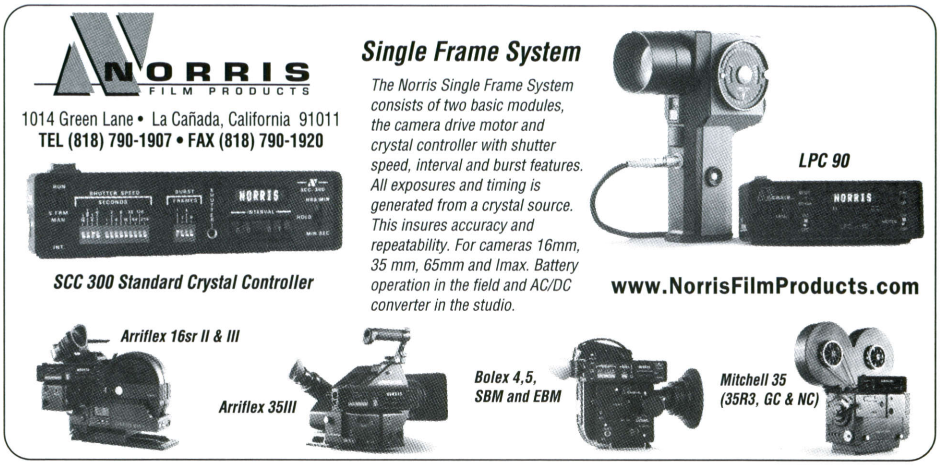


Photos courtesy of Ralf Weinfurtner.

for a sequence in which the woman's son and a friend go out at night, he found an innovative approach to shooting day-for-night. Because the sky was heavily featured in the shots — sometimes filling as much as 70 percent of the frame — Aranyo needed to find a way to make the sky look dark enough. He shot the original footage using Ilford's SFX 200 stock, a black-and-white emulsion that's considered to be partly infrared, and thus very sensitive to reds and not to blues. To make the sky as black as possible from the start, he used a red filter on the lens. Then, from the black-and-white negative, a color print with a purplish cast was struck. This print was bleach-bypassed to desaturate the color and enhance the contrast. "It still has a very faint color to it," says Aranyo.

For interiors, Aranyo used Kodak Vision 320T 7277. "It has the most subtle contrast," he says, adding that low contrast was necessary to capture the sense of life being drawn out of the woman. For daylight exteriors, he went in the opposite direction; seeking a lot of contrast to emphasize the harshly lit faces of the townspeople, he used Kodak Vision 250D 7246. The graininess of the film, he says, enhanced the feeling of grime.

Aside from one visual-effects sequence shot on 35mm, most of *Aizea* was photographed with an Arriflex SR-3. Hernandez and Aranyo tended to use extreme lenses, going from very wide lenses (which created a feeling of space



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and underscored the sense of loneliness) to long lenses (which zeroed in on characters like a microscope to reveal the true nature of their tragedy).

An important element of Aranyo's style on the movie was his use of filtration on the lens. "I really like to play with filtration," he says. "I used a lot of neutral-density grads, soft edge and hard edge." By using a combination of grads, oriented in different directions so that certain areas of the frame were darkened, Aranyo was able to direct the viewer's eye to specific points in the image. "It was like painting," he says. "It felt different than if the light were doing it — more emotional than physical."

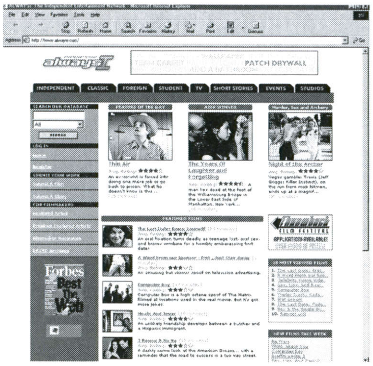
The cinematographer used so many filters that he sometimes filled up a four-stage matte box and had to tape filters on the outside. (He notes that first AC Tom Kost was very patient with the whole process.) His extensive use of grads resulted from Hernandez's directorial decision to keep the camera stationary throughout most of the shoot. Because the film's style consisted of still moments, Hernandez didn't move the camera until nearly the end of the movie.

Aizea was shot in April of 1999 and is now in postproduction — always a long process for independent films, especially for projects with such extensive visual effects. The lab work, including the bleach-bypass, will be done by Arri in Munich.

Aranyo is about to begin working on his next feature, *Two Girls from Lemoore,* starring Dennis Hopper and Denise Richards. He says he was thrilled that *Aizea* allowed him to apply many lessons that he has learned as a painter, including a willingness to push boundaries. "In the history of painting, there's been so much more experimentation than [there has been] in film," he says. "I think filmmakers should be as free in their self-expression as painters have been. I see cinematographers thinking about logistical issues, [but] that is not what really matters. We should feel very privileged to be confronted with this moment of truth and beauty that life creates in front of our cameras." ■

New Products & Services

compiled by Douglas Bankston



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Online Film Marketplace

Shortened from its original AlwaysIndependentFilms.com address, AlwaysI.com is another entertainment Web site offering shorts, animation, Webisodes and feature films. But, unlike many of its counterparts, the streaming doesn't just stop at exhibition; AlwaysI actively seeks out distribution avenues for films submitted to the site.

In addition to its numerous partnerships with other high-traffic Internet destinations that can syndicate the films, the San Francisco-based AlwaysI actively markets those films in its online library to a network of partners who represent traditional film buyers. A filmmaker can add his or her film (regardless of length) to the site for free — AlwaysI will do the digitizing — without forfeiting any distribution rights. This means that while AlwaysI searches for distribution deals, the filmmaker may also seek out potential deals and is free to choose the best one.

Slaves of Hollywood, a feature film by Terry Keefe and Michael Wechsler, obtained theatrical distribution through Filmopolis as a result of being screened online on AlwaysI.

AlwaysI.com was founded in 1998 by filmmakers Gary Zeidenstein and Amine Bitar, who turned to the Web as a way of distributing and promoting their film *Triangles and Tribulations*, and it has been growing ever since. AlwaysI provides a forum for filmmakers without the traditional means of distribution to exhibit their films to audiences who normally would not be able to see the films. Filmmakers can also use AlwaysI as a "digital calling card" for self-promotion in the industry. The site also holds online film festivals to help promote submitted films.

AlwaysI has developed a number of online distribution deals with companies such as Yahoo!, MSN, Excite, Real Networks and Scour to increase the exposure of the content. The site is now focusing on forming deals with offline distribution companies that would allow films to be purchased directly from AlwaysI and distributed via home video, cable, theatrically or by other means.

AlwaysI basically signs a filmmaker to a nonexclusive representation contract, which allows the filmmaker to seek his own distribution deal while AlwaysI works to find the best deal through its online and offline network. Should AlwaysI find an online syndication deal or offline buyer, the filmmaker is under no obligation to select that particular deal. If the filmmaker chooses the AlwaysI deal, the company then asks for a stepped-up commitment from the filmmaker that makes the company the exclusive distributor for a negotiable period of time. Because it is a Web site set up for open public viewing of content with feedback and ratings systems, AlwaysI is able to gather research as to what is popular for any given demographic to present to buyers.

"We are trying to tweak the traditional model that has filmmakers signing away all their rights for five years to a distributor without any knowledge of whether the [distributor] is really going to perform for them," says AlwaysI CEO Howard Rosenberg. "So far, filmmakers love it. It's a no-lose proposition for them. It's another set of feet on the street helping them distribute their work."

For more information, visit the AlwaysI Web site at www.alwaysi.com, or call (415) 776-7758, fax (415) 398-3750.

Under the Sea

After more than two years of development, Montreal-based Amphibico Inc., manufacturer of digital still- and video-camera underwater housings, has released the Amphibicam broadcast video housing, which is designed for virtually all Betacams but more specifically for the Sony HDW-F900 high-definition (HD) camcorder with a Canon HJ9 x 5.5B HD lens. The housing is rated to a depth of 100m (330') and can provide protection in any environment. All optical and lighting accessories, as well as all electronics, are compatible with topside operation.

Aspheric and binary technology has been incorporated in the lens system, delivering wide-angle, zoom-through, zero-distortion imaging. The combination glass/special plastic assembly absorbs no moisture.

Out of water, the Amphibicam weighs 52 pounds without camera and 72 pounds with camera. The housing with camera maintains neutral buoyancy in fresh water as is. In sea water, it maintains neutral buoyancy with the addition of 4 pounds of lead ballast.

The housing is constructed of marine-grade, aluminum-alloy castings that have been hard-anodized and titanium powder-coated for maximum corrosion resistance. Hardware is made of marine-grade brass and stainless steel. All dynamic and static seals have dual O-rings.

The Amphibicam housing has four handles, two on each side, for operator flexibility. To further suit operator prefer-

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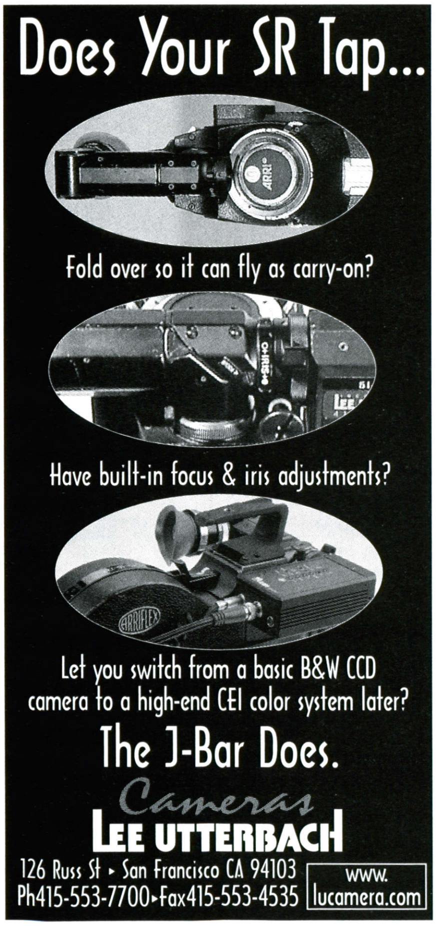
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ences, each handle can control four of 16 fingertip camera and lens functions, such as VTR on/off, variable zoom, focus, white and black balance, filters and others. Every handle has a wet alarm flashing red LED.

A built-in hydrophone records underwater sounds, but the housing also includes a stereo hydrophone plug-in for additional mics. A video light can also be attached.

Amphibico's HDA adapter for Canon's new line of HD lenses delivers distortion-free, wide-angle images while maintaining full zoom capability for high-resolution close-ups. Angular magnification is nearly constant in both air and water, allowing for split images with minimum shear along the air/water boundary. A deep concave dome operating in conjunction with internal high-index optics forms a flat image at the CCD image sensor. Distortion is corrected for both near and distant objects framed at any zoom setting. Objects as close as 110mm from the dome vertex (230mm in water) can be brought into clear focus at full zoom. All optical surfaces are High Efficiency Board Band Anti-Reflection (HEBBAR)-coated, which reduces scratches and allows aggressive cleaning to remove salt-water residues.

For those with digital Betacams or those not ready to move into HD, a similar, upgradeable housing is available equipped with a 6" PAL or NTSC color LCD U/W monitor, but it excludes the black-and-white electronic HD viewfinder, the special zoom-through optics, three external connectors and the menu control. The unit can be upgraded to use with an HDW-F900.

Amphibico Inc., (514) 333-8666, fax (514) 333-1339, e-mail: info@amphibico.com, Web site: www.amphibico.com.

Czech Studio Facilities

Milk & Honey Films has opened a studio facility, Milk & Honey Studios Letnany, in Prague to serve the international feature- and commercial-production industries as well as host its own productions. Located five miles from the heart of Prague in the Letnany suburb, the campus consists of two large stages; there are plans to acquire a third to create a state-of-the-art, live-action and digital production facility.

The stages and storage facilities located at a disused airfield were purchased from Letov, an airplane-parts manufacturer. The two current stages are 102' x 313' x 35' and 8' x 313' x 20' respectively. The soon-to-be-added third stage will be 102' x 198' x 43'. Milk & Honey Studios Letnany recently played host to the miniseries *Dune*, shot by Vittorio Storaro, ASC, AIC.

The company is planning to renovate all three stages and divide one space into an insert stage and production offices. Portions of the new facility will be leased to vendors who will offer essential filmmaking services. Future goals include complete special- and visual-effects shooting services, motion capture, greenscreen and underwater shooting tanks.

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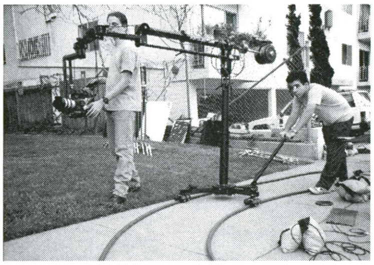

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Screencraft
by Peter Ettedgui

The 17 directors of photography profiled in this book encompass three generations of filmmaking, representing a wide range of visual styles — from *The African Queen* to *Delicatessen.* Lavishly illustrated with over 500 color pictures, 300 black-and-white photos, and numerous diagrams, this reference features informative accompanying text based on interviews with each cinematographer. This is a perfect book for practicing professionals, students, and movie buffs alike.

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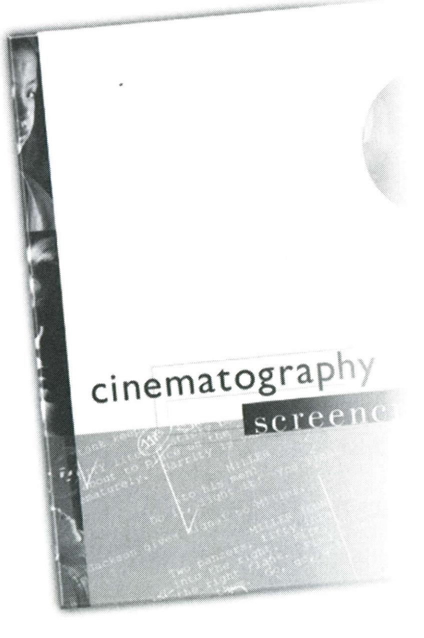

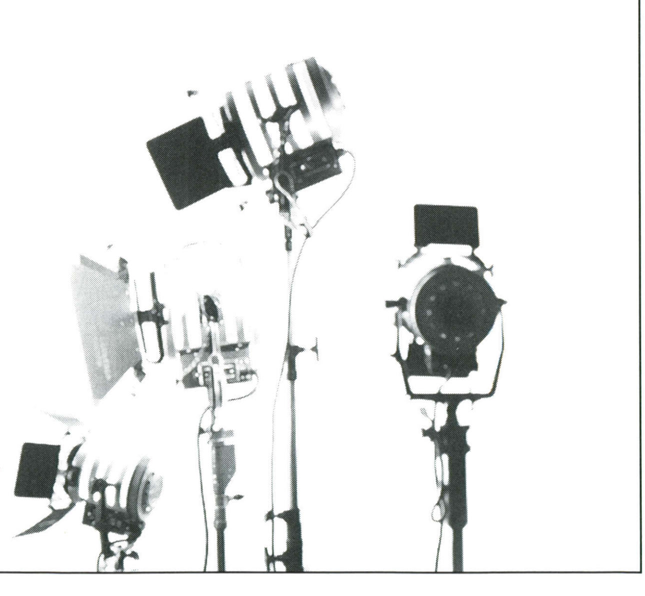

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The Book of Meters

The Sekonic Division of Mamiya American Corporation has published *Exposure Meters and the Cinematographer*, authored by Gerald Hirschfeld, ASC. The booklet details the uses of various meters and their interactions with light, provides pointers, and explains how meters for cinematography differ from those of still photography. It also reveals how the Sekonic 508 Cine Zoom Master, which features incident, reflected spot, and foot candle metering all in one instrument, has simplified the taking of readings.

The booklet is available free of charge. Write to Sekonic Division, Mamiya America Corporation, 8 Westchester Plaza, Elmsford, NY, 10583, or call (914) 347-3300.

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Mole-Richardson has developed the small 200-watt HMI Par DigiMole Kit. The kit includes a head, AC ballast, four-way barn doors, handle and a new lightweight carrying case for quick lighting on the go. The unit will focus from spot to flood in one easy turn of a knob.

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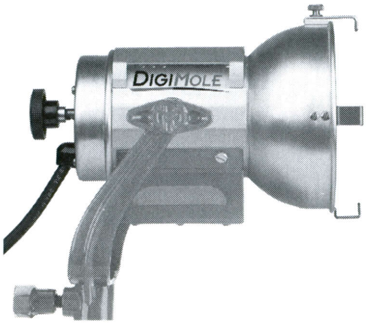

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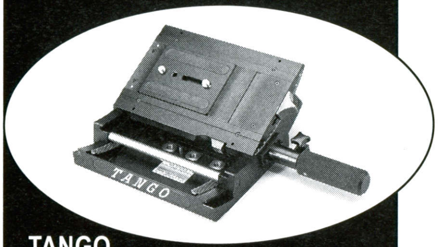

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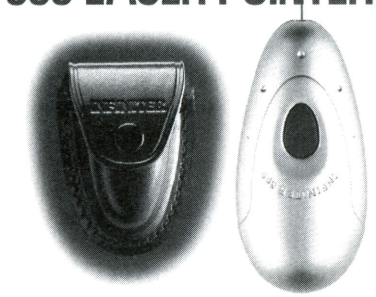

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On a More Theatrical Note

The new GAM Film/FX machine is designed to fit into the drop-in iris slot of an ETC Source 4, a significant enhancement to the concept of the ellipsoidal spotlight as an economical special-effects projector. Using different FX/Reels, one can create the illusion of fire, water ripples, rain, snow, moving clouds and other motion effects. The unit can be plugged into almost any dimmer or controlled by DMX using a GAM/DMX power box.

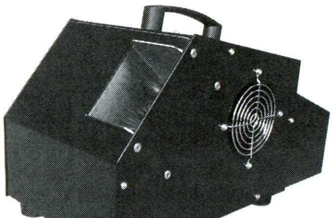
The Film/FX machine is constructed of stainless steel to ensure stability of the framework in the high-temperature environment of an ellipsoidal spotlight. The design allows for reliable, continuous motion using a chemically milled stainless-steel or polyester film loop called the FX/Reel.

GAMProducts, Inc., (888) GAMCOLOR or (323) 461-0200, fax (323) 461-4308.

A Hazy Shade of Fog

Theatre Effects is the exclusive distributor of the Unique hazer by Look! Solutions of Germany. The Unique hazer allows independent control of both pump and fan through 99 discrete steps. By combining various pump and fan settings, any effect can be achieved, from the finest mist to the heaviest haze.

The Unique has a minimal warm-up time of only one minute and will not shut down to reheat. It offers near silent operation and operates with minimal fluid consumption — a half-gallon lasts 50 hours. The Unique operates from any DMX console with no optional interface required. Every single parameter is controlled by microprocessor for trouble-free operation.



The hazer can also be controlled from an analog console or by using controls on the machine itself in stand-alone mode. The adjustment of the pump, fan and DMX start address is achieved with micro switches and an LED display. Unique Haze Fluid is a glycol-based fluid available for exclusive use in the Unique hazer and is sold in special half-gallon containers that fit directly into a rack at the rear of the machine.

The hazer consumes 1,200 watts of power and measures 10 1/2" x 8 1/2" x 17".

For more information, contact Theatre Effects at (800) 791-7646 or (301) 791-7646, e-mail: service@theatrefx.com.

Fast Fuji Film

Fuji Photo Film U.S.A., Inc. has released the Super F-400 (EI 400T), a new low-contrast color-negative film for cinematography that combines high speed with impressively fine grain and restrained color saturation.

The film is available as Type 8582 for 35mm and 8682 for 16mm and provides gentle, extended tonality, enabling exceptional capture of shadow detail. In combination with its outstanding color balance, the F-400's long, linear tonal scale makes it ideal for telecine transfer to videotape.

"Fujifilm developed the F-400 in response to growing demand from cinematographers for greater film speed and a wider choice of artistic options," says Mark W. Murphy, vice president and general manager of Fuji's Professional Motion Picture Products Division. "Since the film's large amount of shadow information can be readily processed after transfer to videotape, it opens up a world of new creative possibilities in feature, television series, commercial and other film-to-tape productions.

"Despite its EI 400 speed, Fujifilm's Super Uniform Fine Grain (SUFG) technology ensures a high image quality in a wide range of scenes," Murphy adds. "At the same time, it helps to smooth out the appearance of skin blemishes, crow's feet and wrinkles."

The F-400 exhibits several key features. Its high speed and long, linear tonal scale offer a gentle, low-contrast subtlety. Regardless of the light levels, tones are smooth and natural, without suffering blown-out highlights. The film also captures outstanding shadow detail. It excels in low- and available-light situations while holding shadow detail and full, deep blacks even when overexposed. Additionally, the stock avoids overly bright, vivid colors to offer a more restrained color palette.

The F-400 incorporates Fujifilm's unique DIR technology, which enhances edge effect for even greater apparent sharpness. In addition, a higher level of precise control over the release of development inhibitors, between adjacent layers of the film emulsion, is delivered

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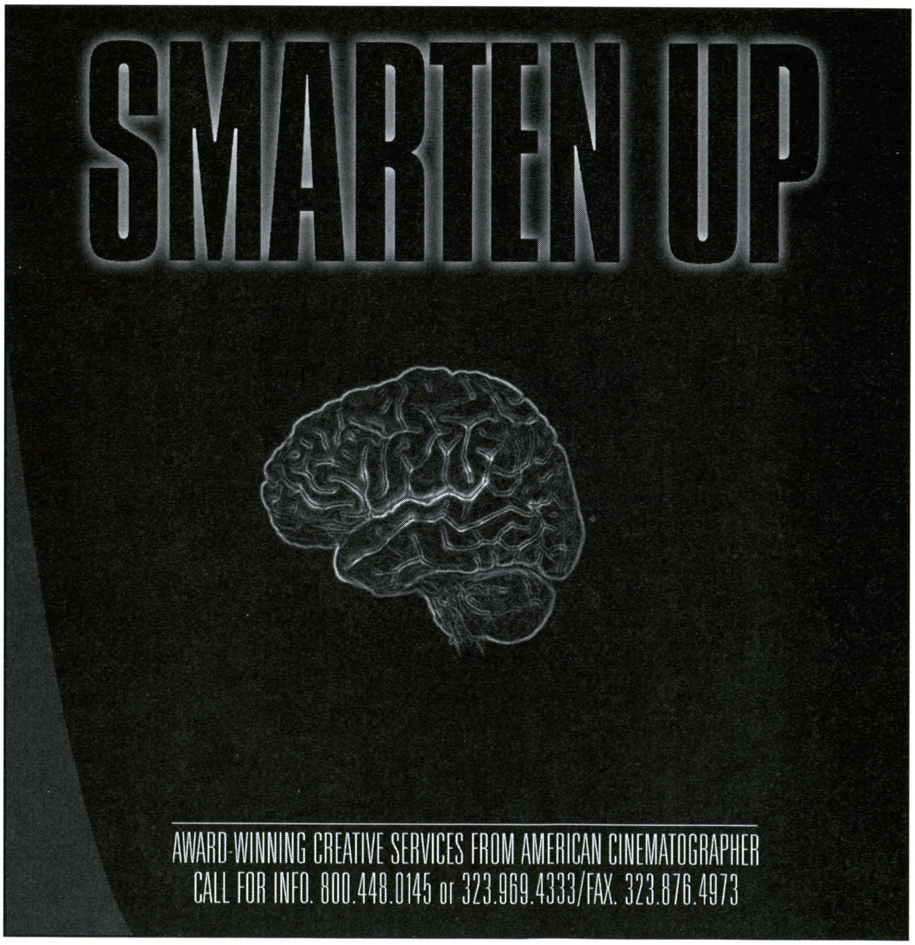
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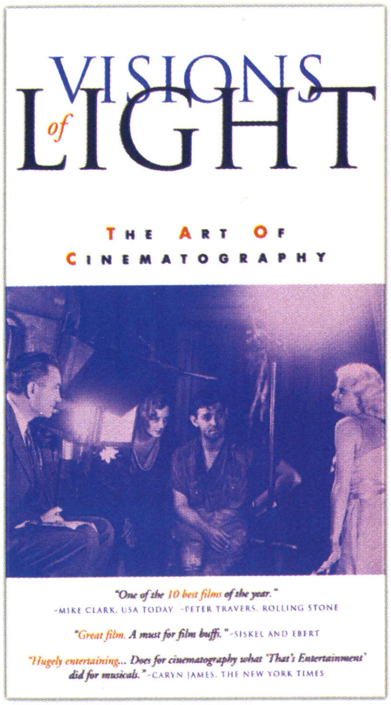
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For more information, call (888) 299-2300 or visit the Web site at www.setstuff.com.

Tape to Film

Filmout Express, a division of Lumeni Productions located in Glendale, California, offers theatrical quality tape-to-film transfers through its proprietary software. Transfers can be made from any tape format, including digital video, as well as directly from computer files. Both NTSC and PAL are fully supported in all aspect ratios. The price includes a first-generation picture negative, optical sound negative (Dolby SR in the case of 35mm) and first trial print with sound.

The video for transfer is first captured into a dedicated bank of computers. The proprietary software is then used to de-interlace the signal, convert the frame rate from 30 to 24 frames per second, and increase the resolution. It is then transferred frame by frame directly to 35mm or 16mm film using Filmout Xpress's H-RIS (High Resolution Imaging System), which eliminates the jitters and stutters that plague many conversions, even on panning shots.

Filmout Xpress is so confident in its work that it offers a guarantee: the company will do one to two minutes of tests at cost. The filmmaker only covers laboratory and stock fees. If the project is taken elsewhere for transfer, Filmout Xpress will refund the cost of the tests.

Filmout Xpress, (818) 956-1185, Web site: www.filmout.com.

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Filmtrust.com is an Internet-based provider of business-to-business procurement and production budget-management service for the television, film, music video and commercial production industries. Using Web technology, Filmtrust streamlines the purchasing, approval and invoicing processes. Studios, production companies and other buyers can save time and resources by taking advantage of Filmtrust's growing network of more than 500 vendors through a fully automated "req2check" process — the process from when the requisition order is placed to the time a check is cut for payment to vendors.

Filmtrust provides a central location where vendor negotiations, transactions and real-time accounting can be done from anywhere in the world. Vendors are from all categories, from costume rentals and catering to rental houses and postproduction houses. All vendor bids for a job are confidential, so no vendor can see what a competitor has offered.

Visit the Filmtrust Web site at www.Filmtrust.com.

Open for Telecine

Colorist Jais Thierry Lamaire and producer Julie Airali have opened a new telecine company in Santa Monica, California, called Bobine Video, Inc. The company's focus will be on high-end postproduction telecine services using state-of-the-art equipment such as the Philips Spirit and the DaVinci 2K color corrector with nine Power Windows in standard definition, high definition and 2K data.

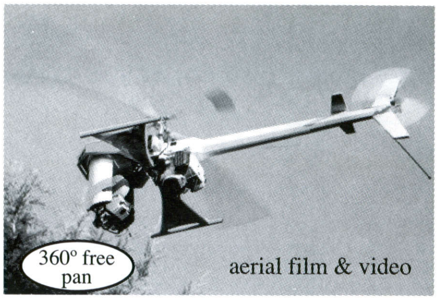
Lamaire and Airali have previously worked at Pacific Ocean Post, Encore Video, and most recently 525 Studios on numerous commercials and music videos.

Bobine Video, Inc. is located a few blocks from the beach at 701 Santa Monica Blvd. #200, Santa Monica, CA 90401. For more information, contact Bobine Video at (310) 451-2207, fax (310) 451-2208.

Post Combination

New York-based visual-effects and design studio Manhattan Transfer and feature-film post house Post Production Playground (PPP) have joined forces to form MP 13 — Manhattan Playground 13. Though the two companies have held a creative partnership over the past six years, the formal announcement cements the strategic alliance between the two firms.

In making up MP 13, Manhattan Transfer provides a solid technical infrastructure and dedicated creative talent in its colorists and editors, while PPP's vast experience in long-format postproduction will complete the equation. As MP 13, the two companies will be able to further streamline their workflow and strengthen the principles that guided their relation-



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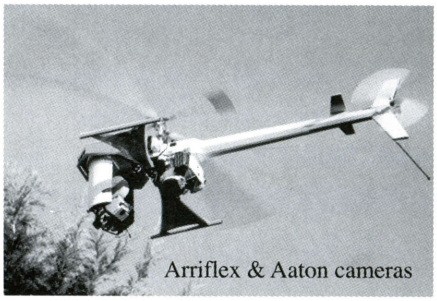

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MP 13 will further the use of digital technologies such as digital "direct-to-disc" dailies and will research and develop products in the continuing evolution of long-format projects in the digital era. MP 13 is pioneering a variation of "mag-less" dailies, whereby production companies can eliminate the costly magnetic sound and still fulfill their screening needs via digital formats. MP 13 has already incorporated PPP's lauded OTA system and software, which cuts down sound-conforming editorial time from about two weeks to only two hours for a full-length feature.

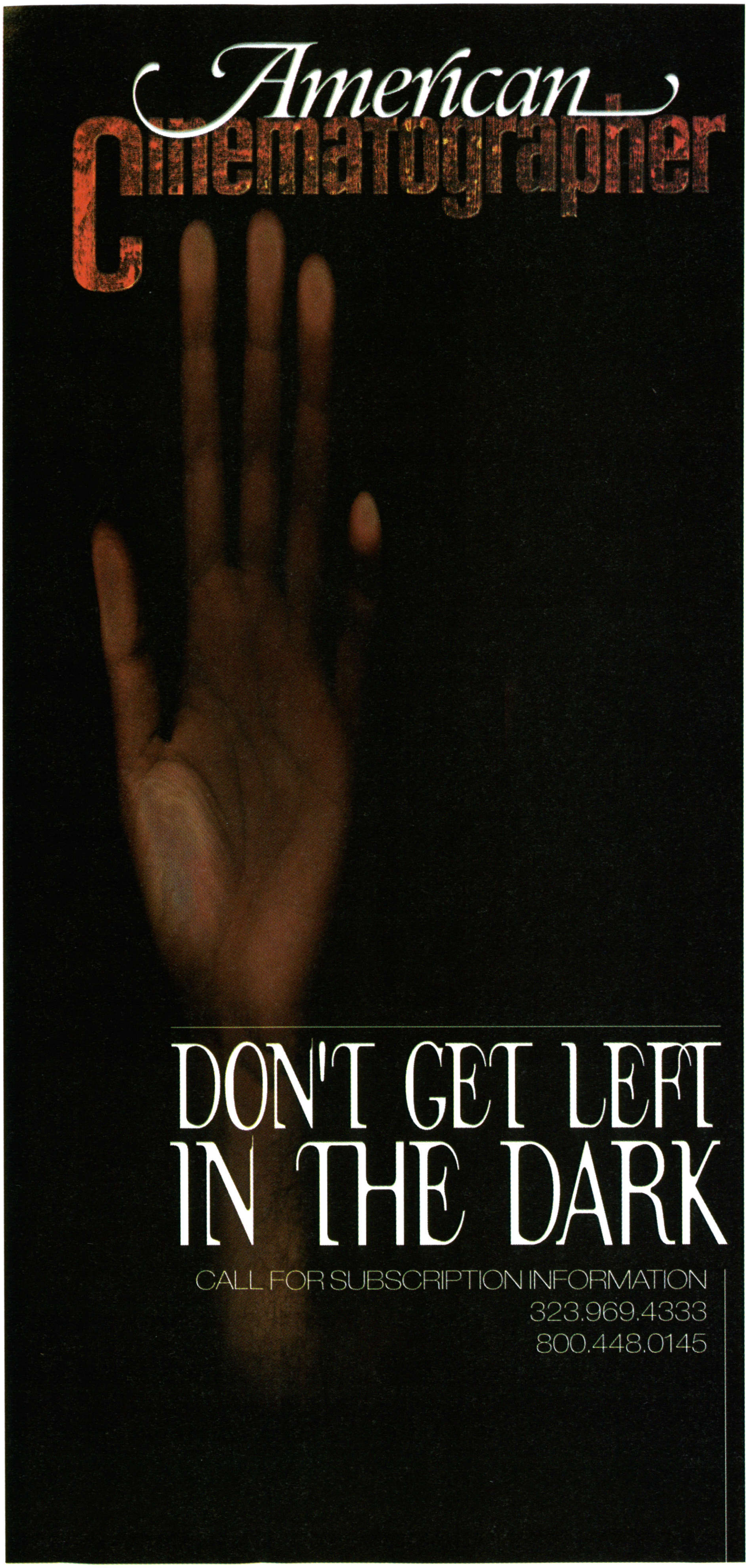
MP13 is located at 535 Fifth Avenue. Tie lines have been installed that allow MP 13 access to Manhattan Transfer's telecine operation and central machine room, where global-satellite and fiber-transmission services can be initiated and received.

For more information, contact MP 13 at (212) 907-1250.

Mini-DV

Panasonic's new AG-DVC10 three-CCD Mini-DV camcorder offers a shoulder-style design for extra shooting stability, an IEEE 1394 digital interface and superb digital-imaging quality. The AG-DVC10 records up to 80 minutes of digital component video (500 television lines of resolution) and digital audio on a single compact mini-DV cassette. The camera weighs only 4.8 pounds and combines three Interline Transfer (IT) CCD imagers with 43mm filters and a large diameter 12x optical zoom lens.

Panasonic Broadcast and Digital Systems Company, (800) 528-8601. ■



Points East

Gun For Hire Targets Post Clientele

by Eric Rudolph

Gun For Hire Post aims to be a "full-service film hotel," according to company officials, and its services include a 52-seat, 35mm screening room. Technicians at the busy facility recently approximated the look of a silver-retention process in video transfers of the Showtime thriller *3AM*, photographed by Enrique Chediak.

Top photo by Wolsch/Pollara, courtesy of The Shooting Gallery. Bottom photo by David Lee, courtesy of 40 Acres & A Mule Productions.

Feature and television filmmaking continues to flourish in New York City, but no matter how many times the city is referred to as "Hollywood on the Hudson," significant differences remain between the two industry towns. Most notably, New York lacks the extensive, feature-oriented postproduction infrastructure for which Los Angeles is known. Gun For Hire Post, a subsidiary of the production and distribution upstart The Shooting Gallery, has set out to change that.

Gun For Hire occupies 175,000 square feet in a former printing facility, just across the street from one of the most picturesque blocks in Manhattan's perennially charming West Village. Behind the building's nondescript walls lies a busy filmmaking center that has often been referred to as a full-service "film hotel," according to the company's executive vice president, David Tuttle, and vice president, Pete Conlin.

Conlin and Tuttle say that Gun For Hire distinguishes itself from other New York post houses with a full menu of services and an orientation toward features and filmed television, as opposed to commercials, which are the focus of most post houses in New York. "At Gun For Hire Post, long-form filmmakers don't feel that they're visiting on the turf of advertising," Conlin notes. "Gun For Hire has the services and attitude long-form filmmakers expect." These include turnkey production offices, dailies pickup, syncing and screening facilities, Avid editing suites, sound and music production and editing, ADR, Foley, preview screenings and CGI (which is offered by on-premises partner company Gallium Digital Pictures).

The success of the New York shop has led Gun For Hire to build sister facilities in Toronto, Vancouver and, most recently, Miami. A Los Angeles facility is in the planning stages, as is global expansion. Operations are coordinated out of New York, and Tuttle notes that the Toronto-New York connection is especially close. Conlin adds, "Most films that shoot for two weeks in New York are also going to do six weeks in Toronto, so we give them one quote that covers everything they need in both cities." The New York, Toronto and Vancouver facilities are linked for video conferencing, which is being marketed primarily for casting sessions as X-stream Casting. "Instead of flying people or tapes around, we can do casting in New York and producers in Canada can participate in the sessions," Tuttle says. "All they need is a laptop, Real Player software and an Internet connection. We'll soon be sending dailies over this system as well."

While similar postproduction services are available elsewhere in Manhattan, no facility has them all under one roof, according to Tuttle. "There's no need to run from the production office to the post house — it's all here. Also, we're long-form problem solvers. We make sure dailies are synced and ready for screening when it suits the filmmaker's schedule, not ours. We operate 24/7 when needed. That makes

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us different and makes people feel as if they have everything they need in a home-like atmosphere."

The New York facility was humming with activity when *AC* dropped by; given its utilitarian décor and somewhat unfinished look, it resembled a busy, well-funded, and technologically sophisticated film school. However, the names on the editing suites put the lie to the film-school comparison; several major studio productions were scattered about the nine floors. Ben Stiller's new film *Zoolander* was being cut on an Avid, and Gus Van Sant's production *Finding Forrester* (produced by and starring Sean Connery) was also being cut nearby.

Production of *Finding Forrester* began in Toronto in the spring and wrapped in New York this fall. In Toronto, Gun For Hire Post provided Avid Film Composer editing systems and related technical support. When the film moved to New York, the company provided three editing rooms with two Avids and a music-production office. Van Sant and Connery also made extensive use of the facility's screening room. "It was an ideal setup," says Dany Wolf, executive producer of *Finding Forrester*. "Gun For Hire Post's overall support enabled us to successfully begin production [and editing] in Toronto and finish seamlessly in New York."

Close to the suite of the Connery/Van Sant operation, James Toback's new film *Harvard Man* rubbed shoulders with the upcoming Shooting Gallery release *Julie Johnson*. Other features in residence included Paramount's *Pootie Tang* and the indies *The Prime Gig* and *Sun Records*. Recently departed from the facility to the multiplexes of America were *Book of Shadows: Blair Witch 2*, *Autumn in New York*, *Bamboozled* and *Barenaked in America*.

In order to meet the demands of today's film-to-tape world, a new telecine room was being constructed at press time; this area will feature a Philips Quadra Vision telecine and a Pandora Platinum color-correction system. The telecine facility will offer direct output to Avid files. Meanwhile, Gun For Hire Post's telecine department has been busy. Its technicians recently came to the aid of cinematographer Enrique Chediak (*The Faculty, Boiler Room, Songcatcher;* see coverage of the latter film beginning on page 76) by approximating the look of the bleach-bypass printing process on his video dailies for the Showtime feature *3AM*. The movie is being shot on film on a tight budget, which prohibits the printing of film dailies using the costly bleach-bypass process. The television project is, however, finishing to film, and "these dailies give [Chediak] an idea of what the final [bleach-bypass] print will look like," says Randy Starnes, director of telecine operations.

Another popular element of the Gun For Hire Post menu is its first-floor, 52-seat, 35mm screening room and the surrounding lounge space, complete with a billiards table and catering kitchen. The sophisticated screening room was designed by facility director and projectionist Howard Neustadt. (Colin notes that Neustadt is the projectionist of choice for several demanding New York-based filmmakers) A shelf containing Schneider projection lenses and a special spot meter for checking screen luminance are indications of the attention to detail, as is the meticulous state of the projection booth.

Gun For Hire occupies the entire building, and "there is no sign outside announcing a screening room, so A-list talent like Sean Connery can feel comfortable coming in and out," Tuttle says, who adds that Connery and Van Sant used the screening room quite a bit while finishing their project. "We arranged for catering, [and they] strolled in and out of the screening room, watching dailies and eating," he recalls. Such amenities are part of the facility's goal of offering an alternative to what he calls the "New York-hunger style" of feature filmmaking: "Watching dailies with a dripping slice of pizza in your hand." ■

Books in Review

by Ray Zone

Maximum Vision:
Large-Format and
Special-Venue Cinema
by Scott McQuire
Australian Film Commission
156 pps., paperbound, $19.95
ISBN 0-642-48716-2

Large-format (LF) cinema has been on a growth curve for several years, but this unique and demanding form of motion picture is still struggling to find its place in theatrical and institutional marketplaces. The numerous challenges of working in large-format cinema are expertly explained by Scott McQuire in this study, which was commissioned by the Communications Law Centre in Australia, as well as the Australian Film Commission.

"There is a clear analogy between early cinema and the current state of large-format cinema," writes McQuire. "The current interest in new screen experiences reflects a social preoccupation with the way in which technology… is changing contemporary experiences of time and space, in much the same way that technologies such as radio, telephones, trains, cars and planes changed spatio-temporal relations a century ago."

In the absence of much standard literature on the subject, McQuire has assembled a very useful overview of LF cinema from its origins — the wide screen in the 1920s and 1930s — to the Imax and Showscan formats of the present day. This well-organized book was assembled from in-depth research (much from the pages of *AC*) and many interviews with practitioners in the LF field, including cinematographers, sound designers and marketing executives.

LF — like any new technology — suffered initially from a chicken-or-egg dilemma: exhibitors are reluctant to retool without a repertoire of readily available films. In the late 1920s, for example, exhibitors were already going to the expense of installing sound equipment in their theaters and were averse to considering such new large formats as Fox's 70mm Grandeur system.

The chapter "Technology and Aesthetics" offers many cogent observations on the manner in which LF differs from conventional 35mm cinema. Essentially, the story of contemporary LF is the story of Imax, which produced its first film in 1970 for exhibition at Expo '70 in Osaka. The first permanent Imax cinema opened in Toronto in 1971. To date, Imax films (both 2-D and 3-D) have largely been documentaries, and they have played well in the 120 institutional theaters equipped for LF. Today, however, there is an increasing emphasis on Imax films with entertainment appeal as well as 3-D images.

For cinematographers, the Imax format presents considerable challenges. The wide peripheral view has been called a "frameless" image, and it invokes a very immersive and environmental response with visceral physical sensations. This sensory aspect, combined with the high level of visual information, creates different requirements for framing, depth-of-field and camera movement. Geoff Burton, director of photography on the Imax film *Sydney: The Story of a City*, points out that "you can't cheat on any part of the frame. Every part of the frame will be seen." He adds that Imax frames also have a different "sweet spot" than 35mm screens: "It's midway laterally, and about one third up from the bottom. Everything that's important — a close-up, a face, a head or a figure — has to be there."

➢

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Until recently, depth of field has been extremely shallow with the Imax cameras. Pulling focus is essential, but the recent development of 800 ASA 65mm film stock has alleviated this situation a bit. However, as Andre Fleuren, cinematographer on the Imax film *Wings of Courage,* points out, "You basically need an extra stop for Imax. If you would normally expose [at] f4, in Imax 65mm that would be f2.8." The "money shot" in the Imax format is the fly-through or the roller-coaster shot, and the best type of camera is either toward or away from the subject. Lateral movement can be a problem because of the system itself, which uses horizontally traveling film within the camera and an enormous negative area projected at 24 fps. Without a deliberately slow movement, strobing can be a problem.

McQuire includes chapters on the economics and technical considerations of the "ride film." The book closes with some reflections on subjectivity and immersive entertainment. "It was through the chase and train genres," writes McQuire, "that cinema first began to move away from its fairground and vaudeville origins" toward "the narrative terrain with which we are familiar today."

Death on the Cheap: The Lost B Movies of Film Noir!

by Arthur Lyons
Preface by Gerald Petievich
Da Capo Press
200 pps., paper, $17.50

At an exhibition of American films in Paris in 1946, French movie critics got their first view of some Hollywood movies that had been made since World War II. Some of the films shown were *Laura, The Maltese Falcon, Double Indemnity, The Woman in the Window* and *Murder, My Sweet.* Critic Nino Frank found enough common traits among these five films to create a new classification: "film noir," or, literally, "black film." These films were dark in mood and look, with their main action taking place at night on rain-slicked city streets, within narrow alleys and sleazy hotels. The characters in these films were con men and killers, corrupt cops and scheming femmes fatales.

Several previous books have celebrated and annotated this uniquely American form of postwar film, including *Film Noir: An Encyclopedic Reference to the American Style* by Alain Silver and Elizabeth Ward (1992) and *Dark City: The Film Noir* by Spencer Selby (1984). Mystery writer Arthur Lyons has written a new and useful volume on the subject that fills in some of the blanks. Lyons clearly illustrates that the real roots of film noir lie in the B films that originated as a result of the double feature, which became popular in the 1930s. "Thankfully," as Gerald Petievich writes in his foreword to this volume, "the terms 'mise-en-scène,' 'aesthetic reversals,' and 'rhetorical form' do not appear in his text."

By 1930, as a result of the Depression, 50 million customers had stopped going to the movies. The double bill, an attempt by independent theater owners to increase attendance by giving viewers value, originated in New England soon after the talkies. By 1932, double features had become a regular offering in 15 percent of U.S. theaters, and by 1936, 85 percent of all U.S. theaters had converted to the new approach.

The studios formed B units to grind out low-cost fare, usually running 55 to 75 minutes, in all genres — "including," notes Lyons, "the murder mysteries, private-eye films, and crime films from which film noir was to spin off as a subgenre." Film noir proper came into its own just as the low-budget B picture was gaining in stature. *The Stranger on the Third Floor* (1940) is generally acknowledged as the first film-noir feature, but Lyons does a good job of outlining the seminal influences that shaped the genre, from German Expressionist cinema to the "hard-boiled" school of writing.

In discussing the background of film noir, Lyons touches upon economic factors in the film industry, and he provides a thorough overview of B pictures produced by Poverty Row studios such as Republic, Monogram and PRC. Technical innovations developed during World War II also contributed to the flowering of film noir, notably developments such as high-speed lenses, portable equipment, dollies and generators, as well as the production of more sensitive black-and-white film. These tools allowed for more location shooting, which was so important to the look of film noir.

The classic period of film noir is generally acknowledged to be 1940 to 1959. Production of the genre, for the most part, was to remain fallow for about 30 years after 1960. But by the late 1980s, a generation of young filmmakers would rediscover the artistry of film noir via the VCR. These filmmakers have recently given us some inspired examples of the genre, including *Pulp Fiction* (1994), *The Usual Suspects* (1995), *Fargo* (1996) and *L.A. Confidential* (1997).

Lyons's filmography takes up over half of his book and includes all of those films left out of the previously published histories of film noir. A highly entertaining and essential history of this uniquely American genre, *Death on the Cheap* belongs on the bookshelf right beside those other works. ■

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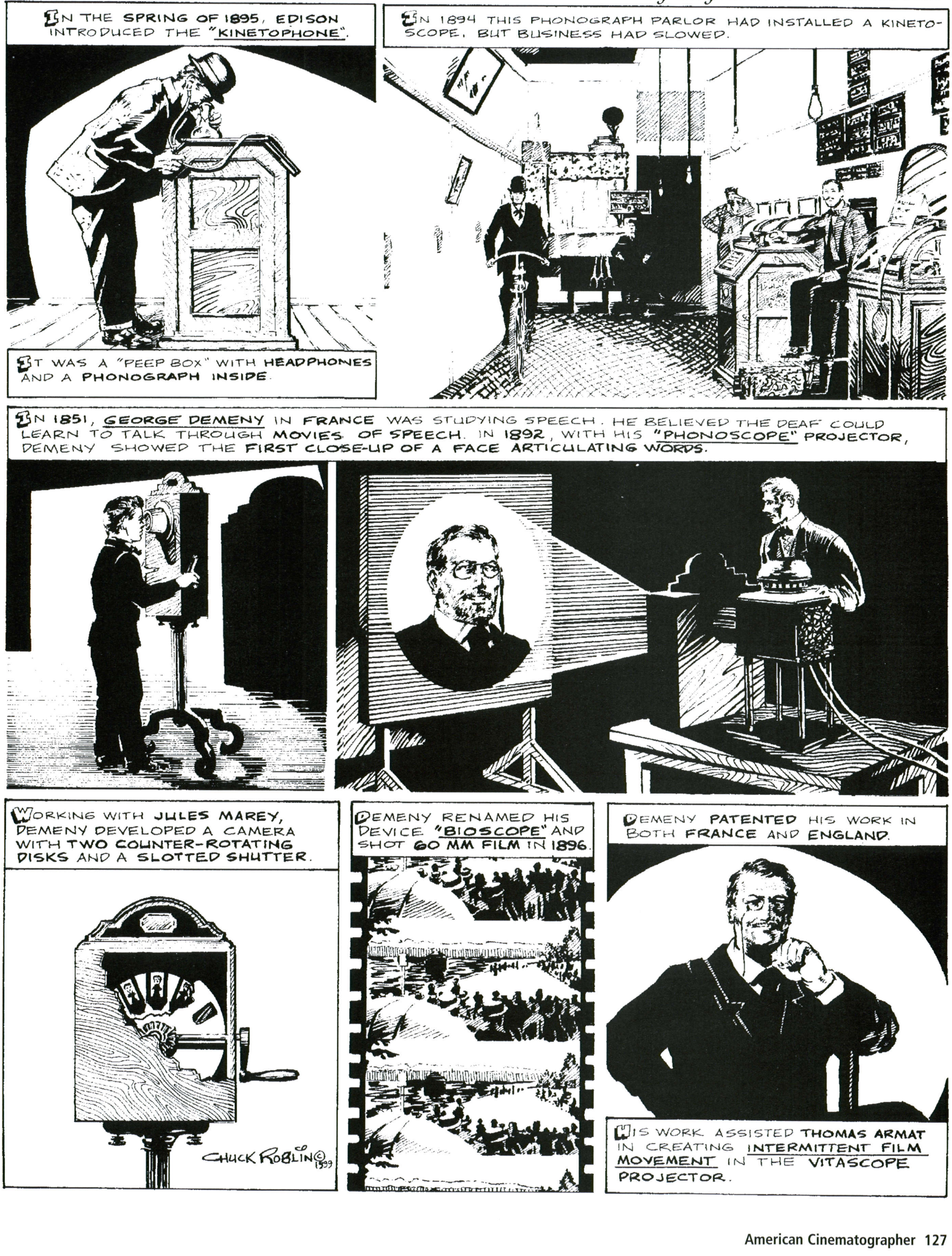
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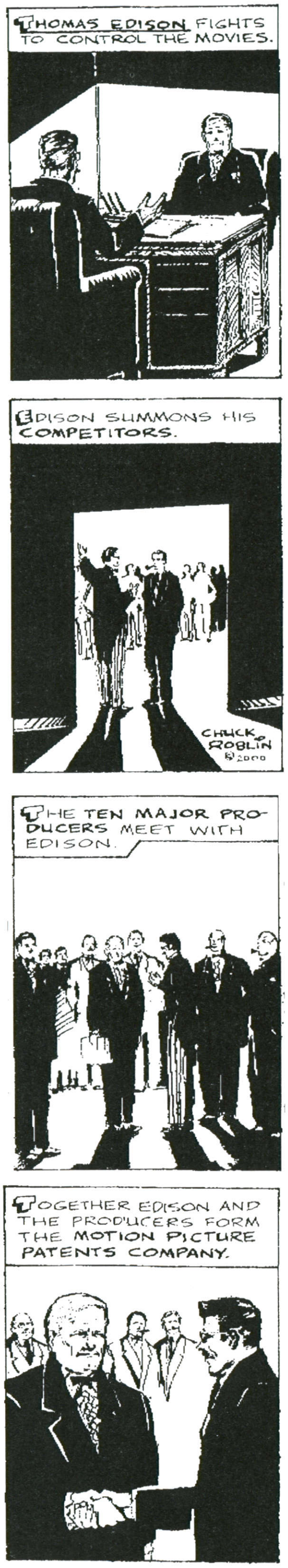
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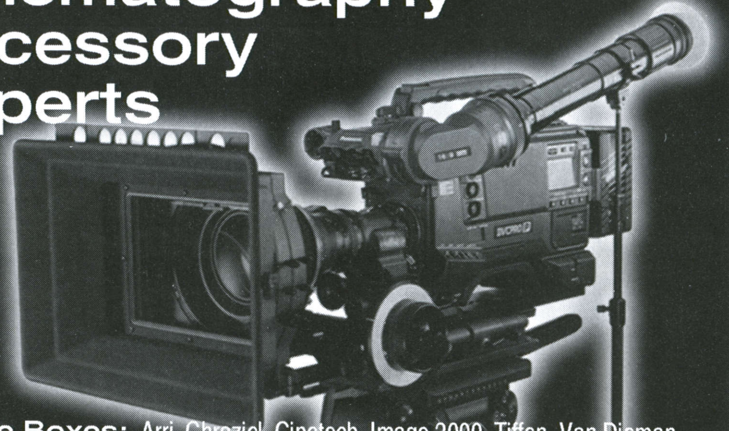

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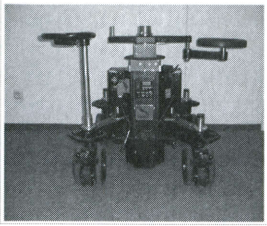

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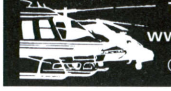

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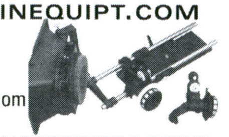

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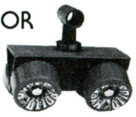

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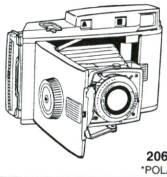

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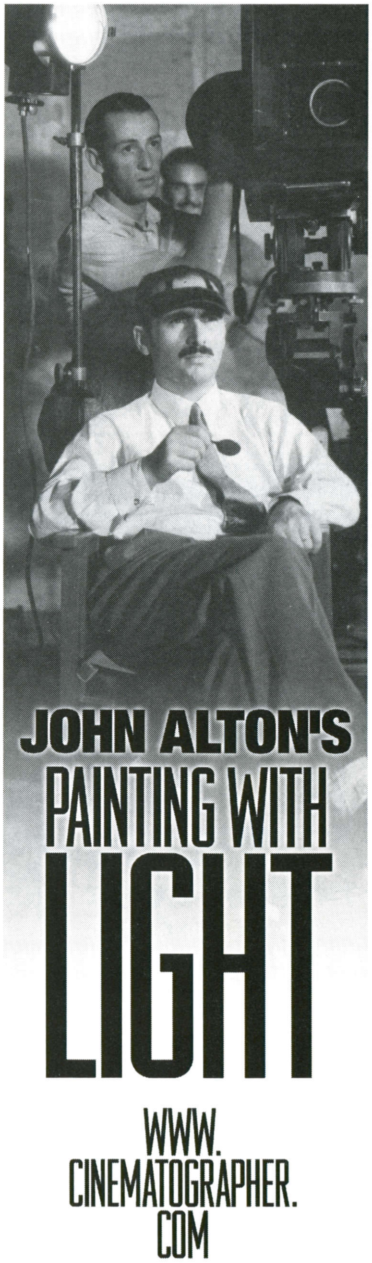
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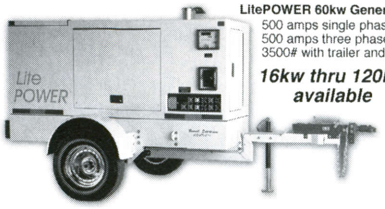

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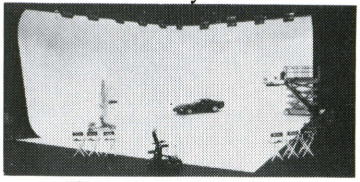

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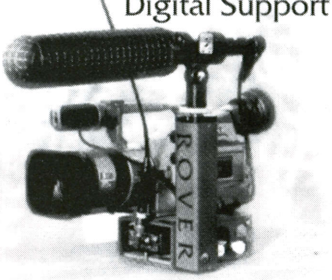

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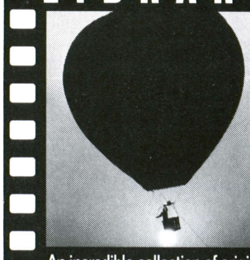

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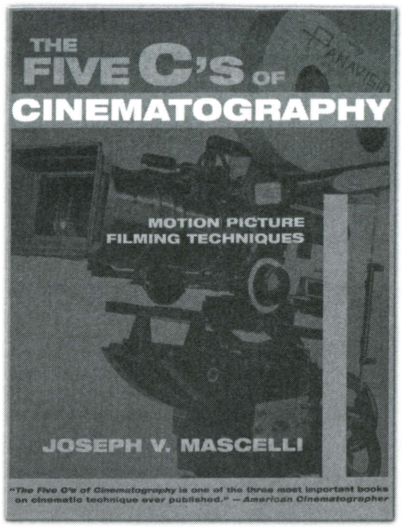
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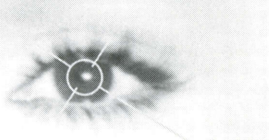

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From the Clubhouse

Photo by Tory Kooyman

ASC To Honor Storaro

Vittorio Storaro, ASC, AIC has been selected to receive the ASC Lifetime Achievement Award, given annually to a cinematographer whose body of work has made an important and enduring impression on the art of filmmaking. The award will be presented at the 15th Annual ASC Outstanding Achievement Awards dinner on February 18, 2001, at the Century Plaza Hotel.

Storaro is among elite company, having won three Academy Awards for his work on *Apocalypse Now*, *Reds* and *The Last Emperor*. He was also nominated for *Dick Tracy*. BSC fellow Freddie Young and ASC fellows Robert Surtees, Winton Hoch and Arthur Miller are the only other cinematographers to have won three Oscars. (ASC fellows Joe Ruttenberg and Harry Stradling are the only cinematographers to have won four.) Storaro's body of Oscar-eligible work is much smaller in comparison because many of his early films were produced and released in Europe.

Storaro's highly notable films also include *The Conformist*, *1900*, *Last Tango in Paris*, *Luna*, *Tucker: The Man and His Dream*, *Ladyhawke* and *Bulworth*. He has also filmed the miniseries *Peter the Great*, the opera *La Traviata*, the documentary *The History of Rome*, and the 3-D film *Captain Eo*. His most recent works are the feature *Goya in Bordeaux* and the miniseries *Dune*.

"All great films are a resolution of a conflict between darkness and light," he notes. "There is no single right way to express yourself. There are infinite possibilities for the use of light with shadows and colors. The decisions you make about composition, movement, and the countless combinations of these and other variables are what make it an art."

"Vittorio Storaro is an extraordinary artist with incomparable talents and skills," says ASC President Victor J. Kemper. "He is still in the process of creating an extraordinary body of work; however, he is already a role model and constant source of inspiration for cinematographers and other filmmakers everywhere in the world. Vittorio has made an indelible impression."

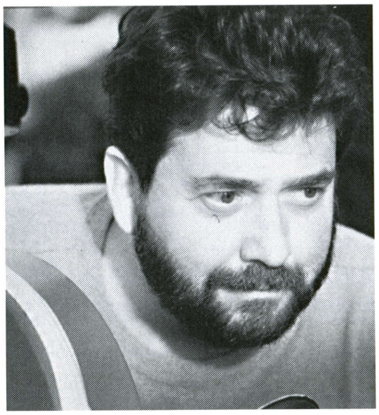
Kemper pointed out that Storaro has played an important role as an outspoken champion for the rights of cinematographers as co-authors of the films they help create. Says Storaro, "It is our obligation to defend the audiences' rights to see the images and to hear the sounds the way we have expressed ourselves as artists."

Storaro is the youngest person to receive the ASC's Lifetime Achievement Award. He and Swedish-born Sven Nykvist, ASC are the only recipients who are not native U.S. citizens.

"Our members came to the

conclusion that while he still has many great films in his future," says Kemper, "Vittorio deserves this recognition for his accomplishments, which are universal rather than national. There was no point in waiting, because there is no doubt that he is a great artist who satisfies all of the criteria for this award."

Storaro responds, "I didn't expect to receive this recognition, but I consider it the highest honor to have my work recognized by my colleagues."



New Member

Guillermo Navarro has been inducted into the ASC membership ranks. Navarro grew up in Mexico City and found advancement in the filmmaking ranks to be difficult because of Mexico's union power structure. He subsequently moved to Europe and worked as an apprentice and assistant to director of photography Ricardo Aronovich, AFC in France.

After moving from Mexico to the Los Angeles area, his career really began to take off. He has frequently collaborated with directors Robert Rodriguez and Quentin Tarantino on such films as *Desperado*, *Four Rooms*, *From Dusk Till Dawn* and *Jackie Brown* (*AC* Jan. '98). He has also filmed the large action and effects movies *The Long Kiss Goodnight*, *Spawn* and *Stuart Little*. His other credits include *Cronos*, *Mambo*, *Amor A La Vuelte De La Esquina*, National Geographic's *Mayas*, for which he received a 1994 Emmy nomination, and scores of television commercials.

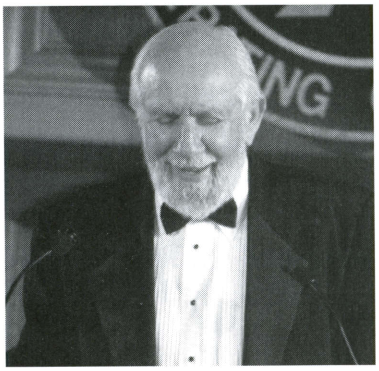
SOC Honors Lighthill

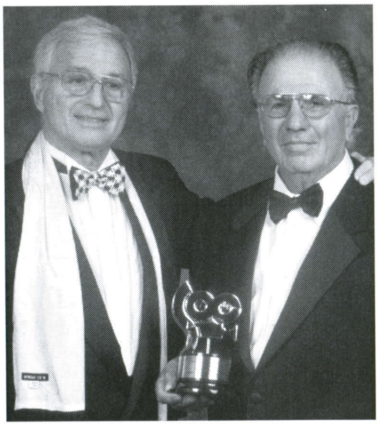
Stephen Lighthill, ASC was honored by the Society of Operating Cameramen with the SOC President's Award at the 12th Annual SOC Lifetime Achievement Awards October 1 at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel in Marina Del Rey. Lighthill, who began his career as a news cameraman in San Francisco, was recognized for his body of work, which includes award-winning and Oscar-nominated documentaries such as *Seeing Red*, *Berkeley in the Sixties* and *Gimme Shelter*, and narrative work such as *Earth 2*, *Nash Bridges*, *Shimmer* and *Break of Dawn*. He is currently shooting the television series *The Huntress*.

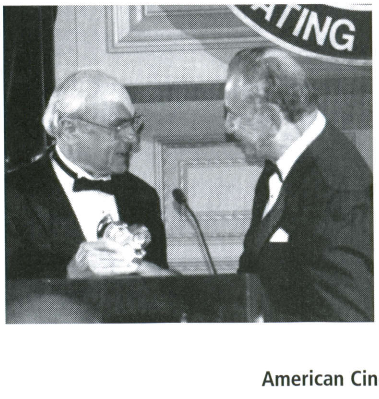
Also at the awards banquet, William A. Fraker, ASC presented an achievement award to cinematographer David M. Walsh for helping to compose the memorable car-chase sequence for *Bullitt* when he was working as a camera operator. Fraker was the director of photography on the 1968 film.

ASC President Victor J. Kemper and members Sol Negrin and Jack N. Green were also on hand to present awards. Lifetime Achievement (or Cammy) Awards were given to film-camera operator Lou Barlia, video-camera operator Susan A. Campbell, assistant camera operator Kenneth Nishino, still photographer Marcia A. Reed, and mobile-camera-platform operator Gaylin Schultz. The Governor's Award was presented to Robert Wise, director, producer, editor and recipient of seven Academy Award nominations.

The SOC Awards were founded in 1981 for the purpose of recognizing and inspiring the pursuit of excellence in the art and craft of operating film and video cameras. A portion of the proceeds from the banquet were presented to The Children's Eye Care Clinic, of which the SOC is a longtime supporter.







Opposite page: ASC Lifetime Achievement Award honoree Vittorio Storaro, ASC, AIC is flanked by awards committee chairman Bud Stone (left) and Owen Roizman, ASC. This page, far left: New ASC member Guillermo Navarro, ASC. Center: Stephen Lighthill, ASC was the SOC's President's Award recipient. Far right, top photo: William A. Fraker, ASC honors David M. Walsh for helping to compose the memorable car chase in the 1968 film *Bullitt*. Middle: Victor J. Kemper, ASC with Cammy Award-winner Gaylin Schultz. Bottom: Sol Negrin, ASC presents a Cammy Award to film camera operator Lou Barlia.

WRAP SHOT

Graf Orlok's consultation with Thomas Hutter in F.W. Murnau's *Nosferatu* (above) is recreated in *Shadow of the Vampire* by Willem Dafoe (left) and Eddie Izzard.

Bearing the ominous title card "Nosferatu! That name rings out like the cry of a bird of prey. Never speak it aloud," the 1922 eight-reel German Expressionist masterpiece *Nosferatu, A Symphony of Horror* still exerts a peculiar fascination today. Directed by F.W. Murnau from Henrik Galeen's unauthorized adaptation of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, the film was suppressed upon its original release by Stoker's widow, who obtained a court injunction to have all copies of the film destroyed.

Thankfully, a few prints survived. Working within a limited budget, Murnau made *Nosferatu* as the sole release for the financially troubled Prana Film Company, which closed down shortly after completion of the film. In an effort to disguise the unlicensed source of the story, the names of the characters were changed; thus, Count Dracula became Graf Orlok, and so on. However, the broad outlines of the chilling tale remained the same.

Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau was a giant in the German Expressionist school of cinema. After making his directorial debut in 1919, Murnau became a stalwart at the Ufa studio, directing such macabre fare as *Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde* (1919), *The Haunted Castle* (1921), and the immortal classic *The Last Laugh* (1924). After directing *Faust* (1926) in Germany, Murnau traveled to Hollywood to direct *Sunrise* (1927) for William Fox. The filmmaker went on to complete *Tabu* (1931), but his brilliant career was cut short when he was killed in a car accident one week before the film premiered.

Unlike most German Expressionist works, which utilized stylized interior and exterior sets erected within soundstages, *Nosferatu* was filmed at real locations that established a very effective atmosphere and helped advance the story. In one sequence, rolling waves signal the advance of terror as the vampire approaches. Every shot in *Nosferatu* serves a purpose — a terrifying shadow will suddenly intrude upon a wall, or an oblique and low angle will lend gigantic proportion to the spectral vampire moving slowly across the screen.

Cinematographer Fritz Arno Wagner, using a camera that was very likely constructed by Oskar Messter after the style of the Pathé camera with a top-loading magazine, produced some of the most unforgettable images in all of cinema in *Nosferatu*. Unexpected angles from great heights or low angles make real architecture seem fantastic. Long and narrow streets bounded on either side by towering stone walls increase the feeling of claustrophobia for the hero and the viewer as the victims of the vampire's plague are brought forth in coffins.

The camera iris is effectively used to open and close different shots or draw the viewer's attention to small, chilling details. One scene of the vampire's horse-drawn carriage bearing the unsuspecting hero through a scraggly forest uses camera negative to achieve a ghostly effect. Double exposure is used very dramatically to suggest the omnipresence of the vampire and to portray his demise at the end as he dissolves in the advancing light of dawn.

The character of Orlok was played by the exceedingly gaunt veteran of the stage Max Schreck (whose last name translates as "terror"). Only 43 years old when he portrayed Orlok, Schreck made his film debut with *Nosferatu* and subsequently appeared in 17 more German films before dying of a heart attack in 1936.

— Ray Zone

Shadow of the Vampire photo courtesy of Lions Gate Films.

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